

# The Zong Massacre 1781: The Legal and Public Debate Surrounding the Morality of the Atlantic Slave Trade

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## Turner's Modern World

During the spring of 2022, the Boston Museum of Fine Arts held an exhibition titled "Turner's Modern World." This special exhibition showcased British English Romantic artist Joseph Mallord William Turner (1775-1851) and his thought-provoking artwork. Turner, known to be antisocial, eccentric, and private, was a radical artist that focused on historical painting by combining his expressive oil painting style with socially significant events, ranging from the hardships of the Industrial Revolution to the horrors of the slave trade.

In the corner of the exhibition room is a single oil painting titled "The Slave Ship (1840)." Upon first inspection, this 35<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> in × 48<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> oil painting is hard to make out, walking towards it, the viewer possibly believes it is a romantic seascape painting. Upon closer examination, however, it is anything but. There are floating body parts in dark, murky water: arms and legs are flailing in the air helplessly, wrists restrained by metal shackles, human forms largely obscured by the tempestuous sea, all merging with the burning sunset behind. Viewers stand uncomfortable and shocked, struggling with their emotions upon viewing this piece.

"The Slave Ship" painting is based on one of the worst single atrocities of the long, gruesome history of the Atlantic slave trade. The piece is a deeply disturbing image that caused great controversy and public backlash when it was first revealed to the public. The painting depicts the real-life events of the *Zong* Massacre, a British slave vessel in 1781 whose captain and crew threw more than 130 slaves overboard to receive insurance money as compensation. The resulting legal debate that followed the *Zong* Massacre eventually turned into a moral debate that focused on the very nature of slavery itself. In the short term, the horrific event had little to no impact on the slave trade, despite the efforts of several prominent British abolitionists. But once the details of the massacre became known to the public, it played a critical role in ending the slave trade in the British Empire. Turner's painting should act as a memento of the cruelties people are capable of inflicting upon each other and as a timeless representation of the horrors of the Atlantic Slave Trade. A country-wide tour of this piece and similar pieces will highlight this appalling part of our recent history.

## The Zong Background

On March 19th, 1783, Granville Sharp, one of the first British abolitionists, noted in his diary, "Vasa a Negro called on me with an account of 130 Negroes being thrown Alive into the sea from on Board an English Slave Ship."<sup>1</sup> The *Zong* massacre was caused by a combination of inexperienced crew members, navigational errors, a lack of resources, and a massively overloaded consignment of enslaved people, even by the vile standards of the day.

The *Zorg* (ironically means "care" in Dutch), a former Dutch ship, was sold to and renamed to the *Zong* by a British slave-trading family based in Liverpool.<sup>2</sup> The *Zong* was relatively small at 110 tons; a slave ship of that size would usually carry around 190 persons as human cargo.<sup>3</sup> In a hurry to start trading, the Gregsons brought together a crew of European men with little prior seafaring experience. The captain was Luke Collingwood, a surgeon who had never commanded a slave vessel. James Kelsall was appointed as the first mate. A former slave ship captain, Robert Stubbs, was a passenger.<sup>4</sup> The rush to man the ship with an underqualified crew would have grave consequences.

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<sup>1</sup> Hoare, Prince. *Memoirs of Granville Sharp, Esq.* London, England: Henry Colburn, 1828, 32.

<sup>2</sup> "High Court of Admiralty. Captured Ship: Eendraght or Eendragt (master Pieter Gideon...)" The National Archives, Kew. HCA 32/316/8. 1781. <https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/C13505590>.

<sup>3</sup> *Documents Relating to the Ship Zong, 1783.* National Maritime Museum, Greenwich (NMM), REC/19.

<sup>4</sup> Walvin, James. *The Zong: A Massacre, The Law & The End of Slavery.* New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 57-64.

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### **The Journey**

It was common for vessels to take out insurance policies with companies that reimbursed owners if their cargo had "spoiled" at sea in the slave-trading business. However, death had to be caused by "perils of the sea" and would not be covered in the event of natural deaths.<sup>5</sup>

On August 18th, 1781, the *Zong* left Accra on the coast of modern-day Ghana with 442 enslaved people<sup>6</sup>—massively overcrowded even by the standards of the day.<sup>7</sup> The crew was made up of 17 inexperienced members. Each mate was responsible for about 26 slaves, rather than the standard nine slaves per mate.<sup>8</sup>

After a few months at sea, serious difficulties began. In November 1781, Captain Collingwood fell sick and could not command the ship. The passenger Stubbs, the former captain of the *Black Joke*, was given command. On November 21st, a crew member noticed "That a large Quantity of Water had leaked from the lower Tier of Water Casks." Irrespective of the leak, the water rations remained unchanged as their destination was only eight days away, and they still had enough water for thirteen days.<sup>9</sup>

This hopefulness would prove deadly. A crew member mistook the western edge of Jamaica for Cape Tiburn in Eastern St. Domingue, and the *Zong* went off-course southwest of Jamaica. When this navigational oversight was noticed on November 29th, the ship was "about 30 Leagues to Leeward to Jamaica."<sup>10</sup> Now it would take ten to fourteen days to reach their destination.<sup>11</sup> At this point, Collingwood was still sick and unable to command the ship. The situation was even more dire for many of the crew members as up until this moment, seven of the seventeen crew members and 62 of the 442 Africans had died from disease and malnutrition.<sup>12</sup> The inexperienced crew was severely debilitated, and the dwindling supplies exacerbated the hardships on board.

### **The Massacre**

On November 29th, the ship's crew unanimously voted to throw some slaves overboard to ensure their own survival and the rest of the slaves on board. The crew knew insurance would reimburse any slaves that died through drowning. Furthermore, they had an economic incentive: the crew members would receive a monetary bonus depending on the average value of the total slaves they sold at their final destination.<sup>13</sup> So, from a commercial perspective, the slaves were "spoiled cargo" that had lost their value— the ill ones would only lower the average cost of the slaves, thus diminishing both their reputation and compensation— and murderous greed shaped their decisions.

The "massacre" began on the evening of November 29th and continued for two days. According to Kelsall, the killings happened in small manageable batches, with the slaves being "handcuffed and in Irons"<sup>14</sup> to make it less dangerous for the vulnerable crew.<sup>15</sup> That evening at 8 pm, 54 women and children were pushed through cabin windows into the sea. Two days later, on December 1st, 42 men were thrown overboard.<sup>16</sup> It was apparent to the Africans below the deck what was happening, as it was not easy to jettison a human overboard, even if they were chained. Kelsall noted that one African spoke English and told him that the other Africans "begged they might be suffering to live and they would not ask for either meat or water but could live without either till they arrived at their determined port."<sup>17</sup> The crew ignored the desperate pleas.

On the evening of December 1<sup>st</sup>, rain fell and replenished the *Zong's* drinking water. Nevertheless, the killings ensued, with a final group of 36 men being killed on the third day.<sup>18</sup> Ten more slaves jumped off and committed suicide as "an act of defiance." By "leaping into the sea," they experienced a "momentary triumph in

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<sup>5</sup> Wesket, John. *A Complete Digest of the Theory Laws and Practice of Insurance*. London, 1781, 128.

<sup>6</sup> Burnard, Trevor. "A New Look at the *Zong* Case of 1783." OpenEdition Journals, December 31, 2019. <https://journals.openedition.org/1718/1808>.

<sup>7</sup> Refer to Appendix A and B.

<sup>8</sup> Klein, Herbert S. *The Atlantic Slave Trade*. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2012, 150.

<sup>9</sup> Faubert, Michelle. *Granville Sharp's Uncovered Letter and the Zong Massacre*. New York City, NY: Springer International Publishing, 2018, 42.

<sup>10</sup> 120 miles.

<sup>11</sup> Faubert, Michelle. *Granville Sharp's Uncovered Letter and the Zong Massacre*. New York City, NY: Springer International Publishing, 2018, 45

<sup>12</sup> Walvin, James. *The Zong: A Massacre, The Law & The End of Slavery*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 90-92.

<sup>13</sup> McD. Beckles, Hilary. *Britain's Black Debt: Reparations for Caribbean Slavery and Native Genocide*. Kingston, Jamaica: University of the West Indies Press, 2013, 72.

<sup>14</sup> "The Answer of Colonel James Kelsall", 12 November 1783, Documents in Exchequer, E112/1528, TNA.

<sup>15</sup> Refer to Appendix C.

<sup>16</sup> Walvin, James. *The Zong: A Massacre, The Law & The End of Slavery*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 97.

<sup>17</sup> "The Answer of Colonel James Kelsall", 12 November 1783, Documents in Exchequer, E112/1528, TNA.

<sup>18</sup> "Gregson v Gilbert." *Commonwealth Legal Information Institute*, <http://www.commonlii.org/int/cases/EngR/1783/85.pdf>.

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the embrace of death."<sup>19</sup> One man astonishingly clamored back onto the ship. A total of around 130 Africans were thrown into the freezing Atlantic Ocean.<sup>20</sup> The Ocean would become their graveyard.

On January 1st, 1782, a Jamaican newspaper reported that 208 Africans<sup>21</sup>, less than half of the 442 Africans initially jammed into the *Zong*, arrived and are now on sale.<sup>22</sup>

### **The Initial Trial**

After the massacre, a series of legal debates occurred that overlooked the evident cruelty of mass murder, revealing to the public the true horrors of the slave trade. On October 26th, 1782, the Gregson syndicate filed an insurance claim to their insurance company Gilbert and Associates for the loss of "cargo" at sea, "valuing slaves at 30 pounds sterling per head" under the claim that it was due to 'perils of the sea.' This 30-pound price point was based on the average cost of the surviving 208 slaves sold earlier in 1782. On March 6th, 1783, the trial, known as Gregson v Gilbert, was heard by a jury at London's Guildhall.<sup>23</sup> The question posed was whether or not Collingwood had jettisoned the cargo as a matter of necessity. If it could be proven that the slaves were jettisoned to save the rest of the "cargo," Gregson had a valid claim under the idea of the general average.

Upon examination of the evidence, the jury favored Gregson: the insurers were liable for the charges, under the reasoning that enslaved people were the same as any other cargo. Great Britain's Solicitor General John Lee went on to say,

This is a case of chattels or goods. It is really so: it is the case of throwing over goods; for to this purpose, and the purpose of insurance; they are goods and property; whether right or wrong, we have nothing to do with it.<sup>24</sup>

The dark reality was that all sides shared a consensus that the African was a mere commodity. African labor was believed to be an indefensible commodity to the nation.<sup>25</sup>

This horrifying massacre would likely have slipped by public awareness if the Gregson syndicate didn't try turning a mass murder into profit. These respectable, devout, and law-abiding Englishmen had no doubts or moral scruples about going to court to claim compensation for the murdered Africans. The slave ship business hardened not only the hearts of the crew members but also clouded the virtues of those involved in the trade itself.

### **The Second Trial**

After the initial trial, the horrors of the *Zong* were largely ignored by the British media and therefore kept out of public consciousness. English newspapers only carried brief factual statements about the arrival and departure of British slave ships.<sup>26</sup> The slave trade was only beginning to become a dominant national issue, and published opposition to the trade was rare. It was not until two years after the event that the full story was disclosed to the public.

On March 18th, 1783, the Morning Chronicle and London Advertiser informed Olaudah Equiano, a formerly enslaved person who understood the awful reality of slavery firsthand, about the court reports of the *Zong*.<sup>27</sup> Equiano immediately set up a meeting with British abolitionist Granville Sharp to seek legal advice

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<sup>19</sup> Faubert, Michelle. *Granville Sharp's Uncovered Letter and the Zong Massacre*. New York City, NY: Springer International Publishing, 2018, 69.

<sup>20</sup> Burnard, Trevor. "A New Look at the *Zong* Case of 1783." OpenEdition Journals, December 31, 2019. <https://journals.openedition.org/1718/1808>.

<sup>21</sup> Faubert, Michelle. *Granville Sharp's Uncovered Letter and the Zong Massacre*. New York City, NY: Springer International Publishing, 2018, 74-76.

<sup>22</sup> Refer to Appendix D.

<sup>23</sup> "Gregson v Gilbert." *Commonwealth Legal Information Institute*, <http://www.commonlii.org/int/cases/EngR/1783/85.pdf>.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Krikler, Jeremy. "A Chain of Murder in the Slave Trade: A Wider Context of the *Zong* Massacre." *International Review of Social History* 57, no. 3 (2012): 393-415. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26394540>.

<sup>26</sup> "News." *London Courant* [1745], March 13, 1782. *Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century Burney Newspapers Collection* (accessed March 14, 2022). [https://link-gale-com.ezproxy.bpl.org/apps/doc/Z2000616942/BBCN?u=mlyn\\_b\\_public&sid=bookmark-BBCN&xid=7d194693](https://link-gale-com.ezproxy.bpl.org/apps/doc/Z2000616942/BBCN?u=mlyn_b_public&sid=bookmark-BBCN&xid=7d194693).

<sup>27</sup> "Advertisements and Notices." *Morning Chronicle* [1770], March 18, 1783. *Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century Burney Newspapers Collection*. Accessed March 14, 2022. [https://link-gale-com.ezproxy.bpl.org/apps/doc/Z2000865916/BBCN?u=mlyn\\_b\\_public&sid=bookmark-BBCN&xid=29e8135b](https://link-gale-com.ezproxy.bpl.org/apps/doc/Z2000865916/BBCN?u=mlyn_b_public&sid=bookmark-BBCN&xid=29e8135b).

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regarding possibly prosecuting the ship's crew for murder. Sharp and Equiano would form an "unusual but potent partnership."<sup>28</sup>

Sharp and Equiano went on to tell "the "Account of the Murder of One Hundred and Thirty-Two Slaves on Board the Ship *Zong*," urging anybody who would listen to fight against the slave trade. The public's reactions were of horrified disbelief.<sup>29</sup> The disclosure of the massacre to the public marked the beginning of a change in British attitudes towards the slave trade.

The publicity surrounding the *Zong* led to William Murray, Earl of Mansfield– the nation's highest-ranking judge and the father of English commercial law–being appointed for the retrial.<sup>30</sup> The debate transformed from a legal decision regarding the technicalities of insurance into a public discussion about the morality of slavery itself. No policy, legal or otherwise, could justify the mass killing of innocent men, women, and children.

On May 21-22, 1783, the Westminster Hall hearing was transcribed by Granville Sharp.<sup>31</sup> The Gilbert insurers argued that the crew made 'a Blunder and Mistake' sailing beyond Jamaica, arguing that human error should not be liable for insurance. Moreover, the Gilbert lawyers used the concept of universal humanity at the heart of their argument, claiming that "The life of one man is like the life of another man whatever the complexion is, whatever the colour."<sup>32</sup> A statement like this was extremely rare in a British courtroom during the 18th century.

But again, the role of the court and Lord Mansfield was to protect the national interest. The British interest was deeply entangled in the returns of the slave trade.<sup>33</sup> Britain would not destroy such a fruitful and prosperous economic system because of an ethical outrage.<sup>34</sup> Thus, Mansfield emphasized that it was an insurance claim, not a murder trial, claiming that "the case of slaves was the same as if horses had been overboard." Moreover, Justice Lee added that the crew was "well-serving honourable men" and that it would be "madness" to accuse them of murder.<sup>35</sup> Specific legal cases had to be made rather than moral arguments for the trial to progress.

As the insurers started to lose hope, a turning point for Lord Mansfield was when he learned that the last group of 36 slaves 'were thrown overboard a Day after the Rain.... A fact which I am not really apprised of...'. It is now clear that "a Blunder and Mistake the Ignorance of those with whom the Ship was entrusted but it is not a Peril within the Policy." All three judges unanimously agreed. Mansfield concluded on May 22nd, 1783, that the trial "very well deserves a re-examination."<sup>36</sup> However, a second trial never took place as the Gregsons dropped his claim, likely realizing the negative publicity it would bring to him.

### **The Abolition Movement**

Immediately after the *Zong* massacre came to light, Sharp and the abolitionists failed to bring murder charges against the crew.<sup>37</sup> The slave trade continued unabated. From 1780 to 1810, British slave ships carried 947,163 Africans to the Americas.<sup>38</sup> Rather than being hindered, Gregson's slave business became more lucrative. However, the *Zong* trials started having a consequence; the British public began opposing the slave trade, even though the Liverpool slave merchants became busier than ever.

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<sup>28</sup> Walvin, James. *The Zong: A Massacre, The Law & The End of Slavery*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 105.

<sup>29</sup> Hoare, Prince. *Memoirs of Granville Sharp, Esq.* London, England: Henry Colburn, 1828, 52-56.

<sup>30</sup> Byrne, Paula. Belle: *The Slave Daughter and the Lord Chief Justice*. United Kingdom: Harper Perennial, 2014, 196-200.

<sup>31</sup> Faubert, Michelle. *Granville Sharp's Uncovered Letter and the Zong Massacre*. New York City, NY: Springer International Publishing, 2018, 84.

<sup>32</sup> Vice Admiralty Court papers (High Court of Vice-Admiralty, Jamaica, calendar of Records, 1776-1783). Jamaica Archives, Spanish Town, Jamaica.

<sup>33</sup> Mohamud, Abdul and Robin Whitburn. "Britain's involvement with New World Slavery and the transatlantic slave trade." British Library, June 21, 2018. <https://www.bl.uk/restoration-18th-century-literature/articles/britains-involvement-with-new-world-slavery-and-the-transatlantic-slave-trade>.

<sup>34</sup> Oldham, John. *English Common Law in the Age of Mansfield*. North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 2005, 24-30.

<sup>35</sup> Vice Admiralty Court papers (High Court of Vice-Admiralty, Jamaica, calendar of Records, 1776-1783). Jamaica Archives, Spanish Town, Jamaica.

<sup>36</sup> "Gregson v Gilbert." *Commonwealth Legal Information Institute*, <http://www.commonlii.org/int/cases/EngR/1783/85.pdf>.

<sup>37</sup> Wise, Steven M. *Though the Heavens May Fall*. Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2005, 205-208.

<sup>38</sup> Slave Trade Estimates: 1780-1810. Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database, <https://www.slavevoyages.org/voyage/database#statistics>.

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Although the formal hearings of the *Zong* were over, Sharp "Employed every means in his power to give the utmost publicity to the circumstances that had happened, and the arguments that had been employed."<sup>39</sup> He lobbied the prime minister, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the Bishops of Chester and Peterborough, and the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty to consider "the absolute necessity to abolish the Slave Trade."<sup>40</sup> Sharp was busy forming networks with men at the top of all influential professions. Even men that worked on slave ships looked back at the *Zong* with repugnance. However, Sharp struggled to find traction and was challenged by those in power who tried to protect this essential national revenue source.<sup>41</sup>

Sharp eventually turned to the Church of England, as he was aware of their social and political power. He came to believe that Britain's involvement with African slavery was a nationwide sin that would lead to divine punishment.<sup>42</sup> The American colonies separated from Britain in 1776, which Sharp argued was Britain's punishment for its involvement in the slave trade. After the *Zong*, Sharp argued that the nation should expect further celestial retributions. Sharp also believed that the abolition of the slave trade and parliamentary reform went hand-in-hand. Sharp used the Parliamentary's acceptance of slavery as proof that the British government was not only morally corrupt but resolutely ignored the voices of the British people's own moral capital.<sup>43</sup>

The *Zong* case goes back to the root of the slave system, exposing the blatant contradictions between the slave trade and the basic tenets of English law. When the formal abolition campaign launched in 1787, the *Zong* was discussed by the likes of Thomas Clarkson, James Ramsay, and John Newton in abolitionist literature.<sup>44</sup> Within weeks, the movement took off. Finally, from May 1st, 1807, onwards, The Act for the Abolition of the Slave Trade legally abolished the participation of Britain in the slave trade, marking a significant milestone in the history of human rights.<sup>45</sup>

### **Legacy of the *Zong***

The *Zong* was instrumental in opening the eyes of the British to the appalling reality of the slave trade. As tens of thousands of slave ships left for Africa, slavery was not part of the consciousness of the average British person. However, in the case of the *Zong*, mass murder happened on a *British* ship by *British* sailors, with *British* merchants later demanding compensation in *British* courts. The brutality of the *Zong* massacre led to outcry and shame in the British public towards the end of the Enlightenment. Through the series of trials and diplomatic efforts that followed the tragic event, the *Zong* was a single unpredictable event that provoked a seismic shift in the attitude towards the slave trade, playing a pivotal role in bringing about the abolition of slavery in the British Empire.

The *Zong* should not be seen as a single event but as a representation of the broader story of the slave trade. The victims of the slave trade should not be forgotten. Works such as "The Slave Ship" enable us to remember the sins of our forefathers. Only if society does this can they ensure that such horrors will never happen again.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Hoare, Prince. *Memoirs of Granville Sharp, Esq.* London, England: Henry Colburn, 1828, 63.

<sup>40</sup> Lascelles, E.C.P. *Granville Sharp and The Freedom of Slaves in England.* London, England: Oxford University Press, 1928, 17.

<sup>41</sup> Linden, Marcel van der. "Unanticipated Consequences of 'Humanitarian Intervention': The British Campaign to Abolish the Slave Trade, 1807-1900." *Theory and Society* 39, no. 3/4 (2010): 281–98. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40587535>.

<sup>42</sup> Lascelles, E.C.P. *Granville Sharp and The Freedom of Slaves in England.* London, England: Oxford University Press, 1928, 23-27.

<sup>43</sup> Hoare, Prince. *Memoirs of Granville Sharp, Esq.* London, England: Henry Colburn, 1828, 52.

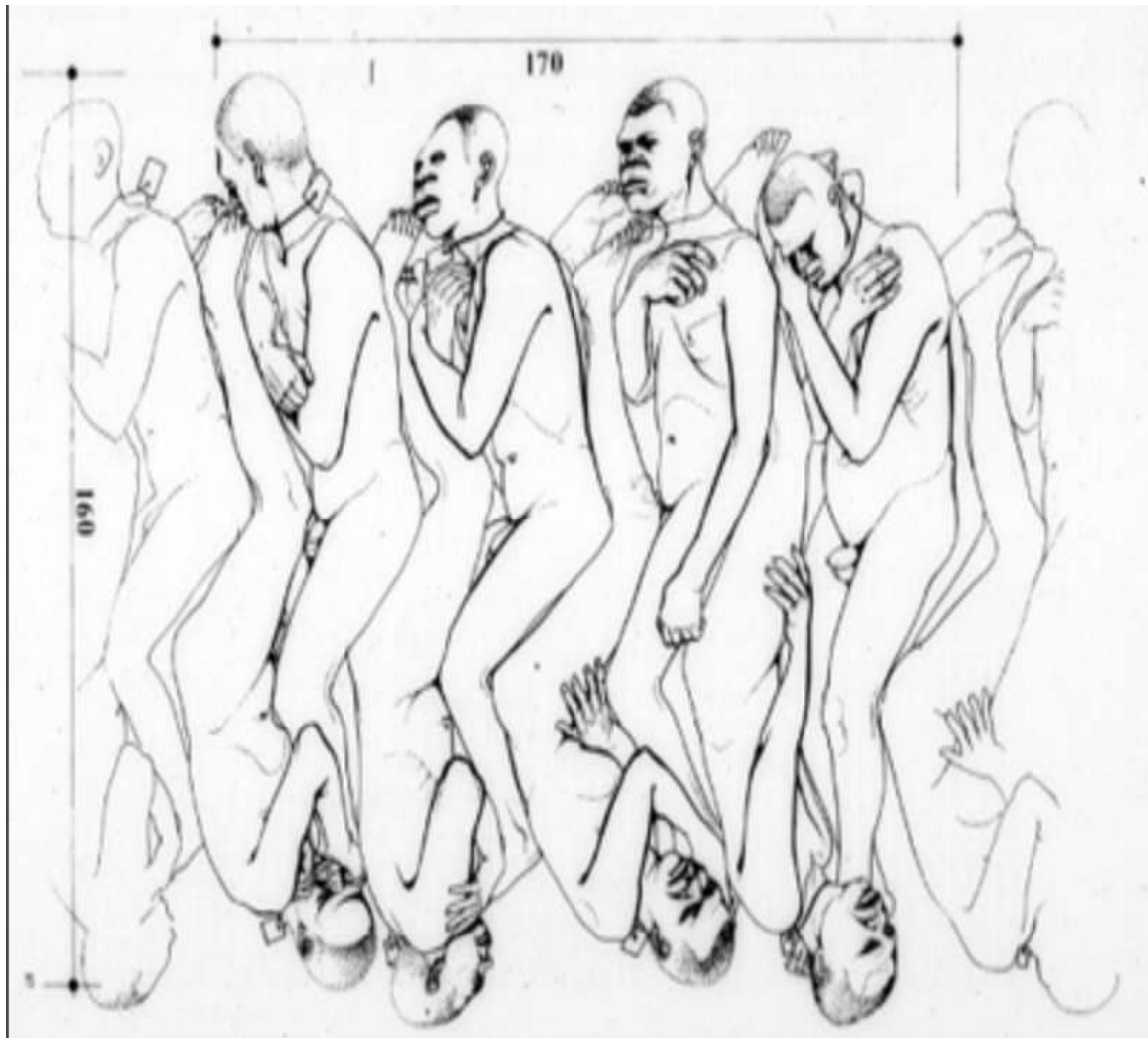
<sup>44</sup> Brown, Christopher L. *Moral Capital: Foundations of British Abolitionism.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006, 54.

<sup>45</sup> "The Act for the Abolition of the Slave Trade 1807." *The National Archives.* <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/slavery/pdf/abolition.pdf>.

<sup>46</sup> Refer to Appendix E

**Appendix A**

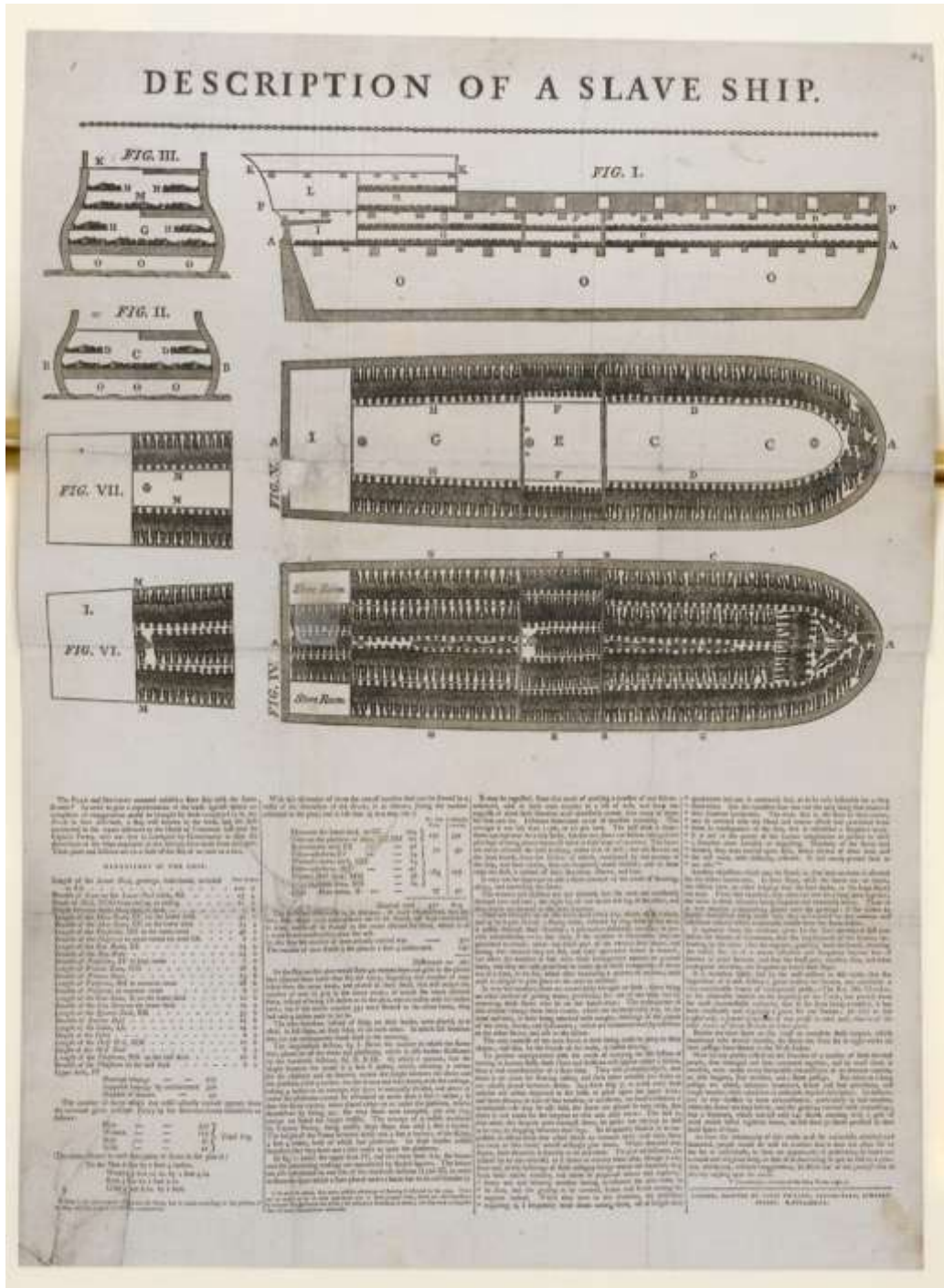
This drawing by Jean Boudriot, a French naval architect, portrays the position of the slaves in the hold of the ship.



Boudriot, Jean. *Traite et Navire Negrier l'Aurore (Position of slaves in the hold)*. 1784. In James Walvin, *The Zong: A Massacre, The Law & The End of Slavery*, 120. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011.

Appendix B

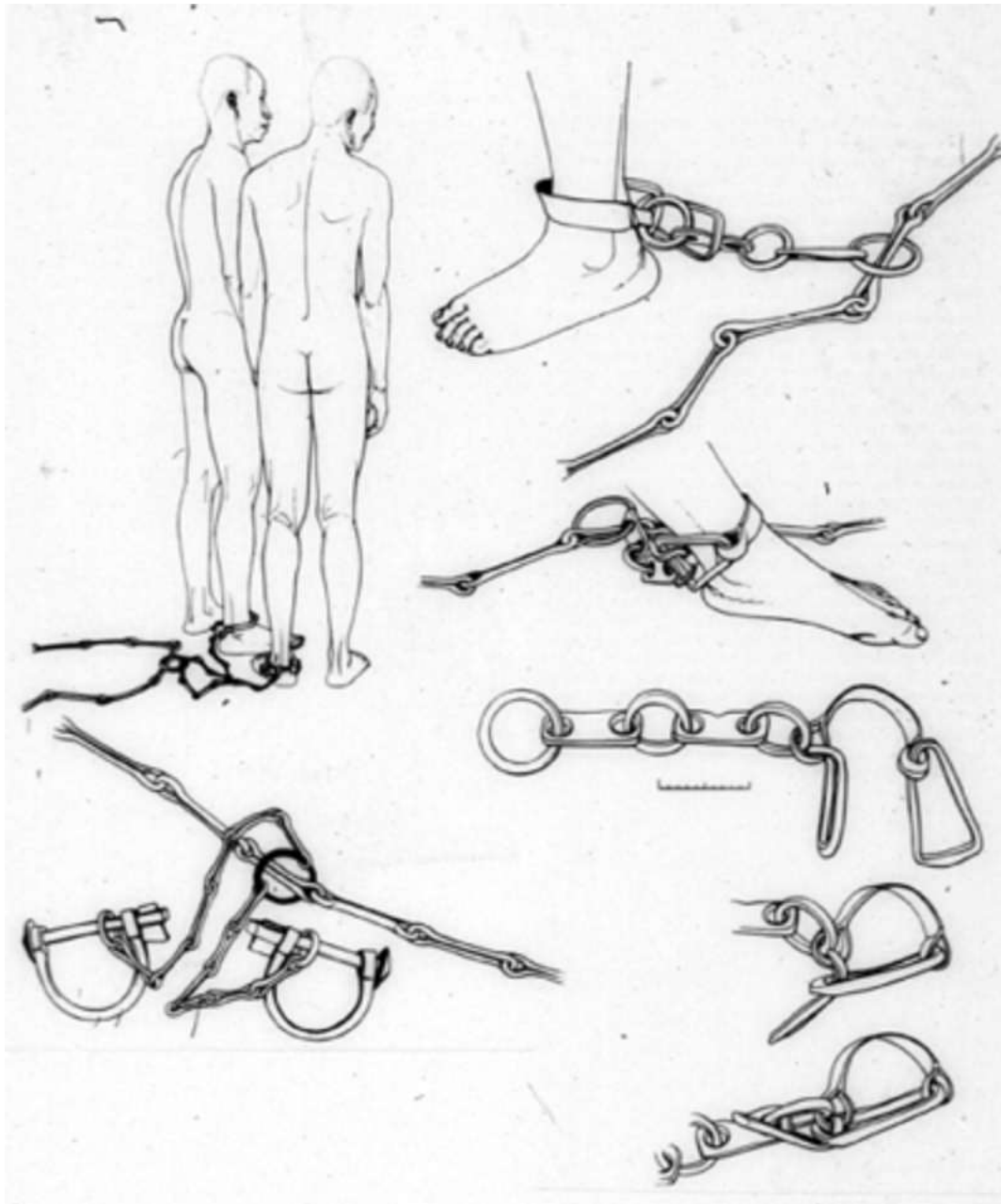
This is the *Brookes* slave ship, another Liverpool ship that carried 609 Africans. This diagram was often used by abolitionists in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century to portray the barbarity and brutality of the slave trade.



Clarkson, Thomas, *The History of the Rise, Progress, and Accomplishment of the Abolition of the African Slave-Trade by the British Parliament*. 1808. Print, Image. British Library, London. <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/diagram-of-the-brookes-slave-ship>.

**Appendix C**

This drawing by Jean Boudriot, a French naval architect, portrays the fetters and manacles the slaves had to wear to maintain the ultimate security of the slave ships.



Boudriot, Jean. *Traite et Navire Negrier l'Aurore (Leg Shackles)*. 1784. In James Walvin, *The Zong: A Massacre, The Law & The End of Slavery*, 120. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011.



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**Appendix D**

This map shows the route the *Zong* took from August 18th to December 22nd, 1781.



The route taken by the *Zong*, 18 August–22 December 1781.

Walvin, James. *The Route of the Zong*. 2011. In James Walvin, *The Zong: A Massacre, The Law & The End of Slavery*, xii. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011.

**Appendix E**

This oil painting by the British artist J.M.W Turner is titled "The Slave Ship (Slavers Throwing Overboard the Dead and Dying)" in 1840.



Turner, Joseph Mallord William. *Slave Ship (Slavers Throwing Overboard the Dead and Dying, Typhoon Coming On)*. 1840. Oil on canvas. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.  
<https://collections.mfa.org/objects/31102/slave-ship-slavers-throwing-overboard-the-dead-and-dying-t>.

## Annotated Bibliography

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This newspaper clipping from the March 18th, 1783, issue of the *Morning Chronicle* was one of the first accounts of the *Zong* trial revealed to the public. It was this issue along with the *London Advertiser* that alerted Equiano about the *Zong*, which led to Sharp's involvement in the case. This primary source provides information on how the massacre was revealed to the British public and how the abolitionist sentiments started from the initial trial.

Answers of William Gregson (January 1784) and James Kelsall (November 1783); and Petitions to William Pitt: Documents in Exchequer, The National Archives, Kew (TNA), E112/1528.

This document describes the response of William Gregson in the legal insurance trials of the *Zong* as well as the firsthand accounts of James Kelsall that were used in the trials by the jury. It is important to note here that Kelsall's interpretation of the event should not be completely trusted, as he had every reason to purposely distance himself from the killings. The document provides various perspectives on the debates that followed the events of the *Zong*.

Boudriot, Jean. *Traite et Navire Negrier l'Aurore*, 1784.

The series of paintings by Jean Boudriot, a French Naval architect, portrayed the horrors of a slave trip. The paintings of the slaves in shackles as well as the tight crowding of the slave ships are referenced in the appendix to convey the harsh living conditions of the slaves during their journey through the Middle Passage.

Clarkson, Thomas, *The History of the Rise, Progress, and Accomplishment of the Abolition of the African Slave-Trade by the British Parliament*. 1808. Print, Image. British Library, London. <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/diagram-of-the-brookes-slave-ship>.

This image of the Brookes slave ship represents the quintessential idea of a slave ship: slaves tightly crammed together in the hold of a ship, revealing to the public the horrors of the slave trade. The image was commonly used by British abolitionists in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century to campaign for abolishing the slave trade. This image provides visual context on the conditions of a slave ship and is referenced in the appendix.

Cugoano, Ottobah. *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil of Slavery*. London, 1791.

This book shows the perspective of an abolitionist and freed slave, with Cugoano referencing his firsthand accounts of slavery to detail the evil of slavery and the necessity to abolish it immediately. This book provides a new perspective on slavery in Great Britain to understand the 18<sup>th</sup>-century view towards slaves with background information about the abolitionist movement.

*Documents Relating to the Ship Zong*, 1783. National Maritime Museum, Greenwich (NMM), REC/19.

These documents provide information regarding the *Zong*, through a series of reports, certificates, and logs with the background of the *Zong* and the actual events during its trip to the Black River. This is especially useful as the original log for the *Zong* was reported to be missing when the ship arrived in Jamaica in 1781.

Equiano, Olaudah, 1745-1797. *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or, Gustavus Vassa, the African*. Peterborough, CA.: Broadview Press, 2001.

## *The Zong Massacre 1781: The Legal and Public Debate Surrounding the Morality of the Atlantic Slave Trade*

This autobiography by Olaudah Equiano describes his firsthand accounts of slavery, his eventual success in gaining his own freedom, and the abolitionist movements that followed. This book provides comprehensive historical backgrounds on slavery in Britain during the 18<sup>th</sup> century as well as a new perspective from a freed slave including the background description of Equiano and the development of the abolitionist sentiment in Britain.

Falconbridge, Alexander. *An Account of the Slave Trade on the Coast of Africa*. London, 1788.

This book follows the firsthand accounts of Falconbridge as a surgeon on various slave ships. Falconbridge portrays his abolitionist sentiments and describes the methods and organizations of the slave trading business and the treatment and conditions of the slaves he encountered in his life. This book provides another perspective on the slave trading business from a surgeon on a slave vessel. It provides the background to understand the slave trading business as well as the living conditions of the slaves during the trip with the details of the *Zong* journey.

Faubert, Michelle. *Granville Sharp's Uncovered Letter and the Zong Massacre*. New York City, NY: Springer International Publishing, 2018.

This book uncovers Granville Sharp's letters and diary entries regarding the *Zong* Massacre. It reveals Sharp's ideas on slavery in Britain and the various challenges he faced along his journey to fight for the abolishment of the slave trade. This source offers direct quotes from Sharp to strengthen the historical arguments with details of his diplomatic efforts to bring the *Zong* to publicity and lead the abolitionist movement in Britain.

"Gregson v Gilbert." *Commonwealth Legal Information Institute*, <http://www.commonlii.org/int/cases/EngR/1783/85.pdf>.

This document reveals the court transcriptions of the Gregson v Gilbert legal trials that followed the killings of the *Zong*. This document provides details on the actual insurance debates with the respective opinions of each side of the debate, which provides details of the initial and second trial proceedings.

"High Court of Admiralty. Captured Ship: Eendraght or Eendragt (master Pieter Gideon...)" *The National Archives*, Kew. HCA 32/316/8. 1781. <https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/C13505590>.

This document describes the initial capture of the *Zong* ship, and how it came to be in the possession of the Gregson syndicate as the background of the *Zong*.

Hoare, Prince. *Memoirs of Granville Sharp, Esq.* London, England: Henry Colburn, 1828.

This document recounts the memoirs of Granville Sharp, a leading anti-slavery campaigner in Great Britain. The memoirs contain great information on Sharp's viewpoints towards slavery and the various efforts he made to spread the abolitionist sentiment throughout the country. This document provides background information about the abolitionist movement and diplomatic affairs Sharp employed to bring the *Zong* to publicity.

"News." *London Courant* [1745], March 13, 1782. *Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century Burney Newspapers Collection* accessed March 14th, 2022). [https://link-gale-com.ezproxy.bpl.org/apps/doc/Z2000616942/BBCN?u=mlyn\\_b\\_public&sid=bookmark-BBCN&xid=7d194693](https://link-gale-com.ezproxy.bpl.org/apps/doc/Z2000616942/BBCN?u=mlyn_b_public&sid=bookmark-BBCN&xid=7d194693).

This newspaper clip from the *London Courant* (London, England) on March 13th, 1782, shows an advertisement for the British slave ships that arrived in Africa with slaves that year. It said "The following ships from Africa arrived at Jamaica... *Zong*, Collingwood, with 208 ditto [slaves]." This newspaper clipping offers statistical information on the journey of the *Zong* and shows how the newspaper covered the event during that time.

Newton, John. *Thoughts Upon the African Slave Trade*. London, 1788.

## *The Zong Massacre 1781: The Legal and Public Debate Surrounding the Morality of the Atlantic Slave Trade*

This 18<sup>th</sup>-century manuscript is written by John Newton, a former captain of slave ships who is well-known for the book *Amazing Grace*. This book provides a new perspective on the slave trade through the eyes of a former captain of a slaver that changed to an abolitionist against the African slave trade. This book provides information on the outlook of slavery during the 18<sup>th</sup> century in Great Britain as well as a firsthand account of the slave trading business itself.

Slave Trade Estimates: 1780-1810. Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database, <https://www.slavevoyages.org/voyage/database#statistics>.

This database provides statistics and estimates on the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade. This source provides the big-picture trend of the Atlantic slave trade in the aftermath of the *Zong*, which shows the short-term failure and the long-term impact on the abolitionist movement.

"The Act for the Abolition of the Slave Trade 1807." *The National Archives*. <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/slavery/pdf/abolition.pdf>.

This document contains The Act for the Abolition of the Slave Trade (1807), which abolished the involvement of Great Britain in the Atlantic slave trade. The document describes the background of the act as well as the actual act signed by Her Majesty the Queen of England.

"The Answer of Colonel James Kelsall", November 12<sup>th</sup>, 1783, Documents in Exchequer, E112/1528, TNA.

This document recounts the testimony of Colonel James Kelsall, the first mate of the *Zong*, in court. The document provides information on the legal debates as well as Kelsall's interpretation of the event and his take on the killings of the *Zong*. It is important to note that Kelsall's testimony was subject to his own bias. This source provides the background of the trials that followed the *Zong* as well as the perspectives of the *Zong* crew.

"The Gentlemen's Magazine 1783." HathiTrust Digital Library, <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/006056643>.

The 1783 publication of the Gentlemen's Magazines focuses on Granville Sharp and his noble efforts of advocating for the abolishment of slavery and bringing the case of the *Zong* to the attention of the British public. This source shows the public perception of Sharp and his actions.

Thomson, James, 1726. *Summer*. Detroit, MI: Gale ECCO, 2010.

This poem includes a description of a slave ship caught up in a typhoon, and of a shark devouring the limbs of the helpless slaves that were caught up in the powerful currents. Although it was written before the *Zong*, it reflects the events of historical events and symbolizes the destruction of the slave trade. Through the poem's poetic description and disturbing story, it conveys the sense of the cruelty of the slave trade and the horror of the *Zong* killings.

Turner, Joseph Mallord William. *Slave Ship (Slavers Throwing Overboard the Dead and Dying, Typhoon Coming On)*. 1840. Oil on canvas. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. <https://collections.mfa.org/objects/31102/slave-ship-slavers-throwing-overboard-the-dead-and-dying-t>.

This painting, created by J.M.W Turner, reflects the disturbing events of the *Zong* more than 50 years after the massacre. The painting helps underscore the legacy of the *Zong* and is referenced in the appendix. The public reception of this painting has changed over time, which reveals how the public reception of the *Zong* event and the slave trade itself has changed accordingly.

Vice Admiralty Court papers (High Court of Vice-Admiralty, Jamaica, calendar of Records, 1776-1783). Jamaica Archives, Spanish Town, Jamaica.

This archive shows the court papers of the Vice Admiralty and the related materials for the crew of the *Zong*. It provides the details of the legal trial of the *Zong* and the different stances of each party.

Wesket, John. *A Complete Digest of the Theory Laws and Practice of Insurance*. London, 1781.

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This book provides a summary of the insurance laws of the slave trading business in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. This source provides a critical background to understand the nature of the insurance claim the Gregson syndicate placed after the killings and the historical context of the legal rules regarding the slave trading business itself.

Wilberforce, Robert Isaac and Samuel Wilberforce. *The Life of William Wilberforce*. London, 1838.

This biography describes the life of William Wilberforce, a prominent British politician who was the leader of the abolitionist movement in Great Britain. The biography provides the historical context for the start of the abolitionist movement and the series of successes and failures throughout the early 19<sup>th</sup> century.

### Secondary Sources

Baucom, Ian. *Specters of the Atlantic: Finance Capital, Slavery, and the Philosophy of History*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005.

This book describes the significance of the *Zong* massacre and the following lawsuits. Baucom provides many preliminaries including the postcolonial theory, the economic history, and 18<sup>th</sup>-century maritime insurance, as well as the history of the slave trade to help paint a broader picture. Baucom's unique approach to the *Zong* provides a new perspective on the event as well as the important historical background.

Burnard, Trevor. "A New Look at the *Zong* Case of 1783." OpenEdition Journals, December 31st, 2019. <https://journals.openedition.org/1718/1808>.

This scholarly journal on the *Zong* case provides a chronological summary of the event, starting with the ship and crew and ending with the impact of the *Zong* on both Great Britain and the island of Jamaica. It provides an overview of the event and the legacy of the *Zong* to Jamaica and its plantation economy which gives a new interpretation to approach the story.

Byrne, Paula. Belle: *The Slave Daughter and the Lord Chief Justice*. United Kingdom: Harper Perennial, 2014.

Inspired by a 1779 portrait of Dido Elizabeth Belle, Byrne reveals the true story of Belle and her upbringing with her great-uncle, the Earl of Mansfield. Belle was a daughter of an enslaved African woman and daughter of a captain in the Royal Navy, caught between two worlds in the fight to end slavery. This book provides an interesting view of the abolitionist movement against slavery from the perspective of Belle and also the important background of the Earl of Mansfield, who was the judge in the legal trials for the *Zong*. This book provides the details of the second trial.

Carretta, Vincent. *Equiano: The African*. Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 2005.

This biography of Olaudah Equiano provides an overview of the freed slave and abolitionist's life, starting from his experiences in the Middle Passage to his abolitionist efforts to bring down the slave trade. This book provides some background on Equiano's involvement in the *Zong* case, which is referenced in the first trial and the abolitionist movement.

D'Aguiar, Fred. *Feeding the Ghosts*. New York City, NY: HarperCollins, 1999.

This fictional book follows the story of Mintah, an educated African aboard the *Zong* ship who can speak English and scares the crew members with her heroic protests. Mintah is later beaten and thrown into the sea but manages to haul herself back onto the ship where she encourages and inspires the rest of the slaves on the board. During the legal trials of the *Zong*, Mintah's journal provides a valuable account that helps directly contradict the crew's words. This book provided a new perspective on the historical event through the eyes of an actual slave on board the ship. This story shows how the slaves must have felt throughout the journey and I tried my best to find relevant information that could relay this understanding to the readers.

*The Zong Massacre 1781: The Legal and Public Debate Surrounding the Morality of the Atlantic Slave Trade*

Howley, Ellen. "The Sea and Memory: Poetic Reconsiderations of the Zong Massacre." *Sage Journals*, October 30th, 2019. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0021989419881233>.

This article examines the poems of David Dabydeen's "Turner" and Marlene NourbeSe Phillip's "Zong!" which both directly respond to J.M.W Turner's painting of the "Slave Ship" and the events of the *Zong* massacre. Each writer uses a unique approach to the event, but both writers utilize the sea as a space to remember and retell the events. The poetic interpretations of the sea that forever holds the voices of the killed Africans deeply resonated with me. This article helped us understand the legacy of the *Zong* as well as the public's reception of the event.

Klein, Herbert S. *The Atlantic Slave Trade*. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2012.

This journal article on the Atlantic Slave Trade provides an overview of the slave trade across the Atlantic, proving the economic, social, and political history of the trade. This article adds an important backstory on the slave trade and is referenced to introduce the background of the Atlantic Slave Trade.

Brown, Christopher L. *Moral Capital: Foundations of British Abolitionism*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006.

This book describes the origins of the British antislavery movement of the late eighteenth century. Instead of focusing on the economic and humanitarian roots of antislavery, Brown shifts the focus towards the changing views of the British nation, particularly from the worries created by the American Revolution as the root cause. This book provides an interesting take on the abolitionist movement and helped me to lead to the conclusion that the *Zong* provided a shift in the view of slavery, creating a spark in the abolitionist movement.

Krikler, Jeremy. "The Zong and the Lord Chief Justice." *History Workshop Journal*, no. 64 (2007): 29–47. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25472934>.

This journal article focuses on the Brookes and *Zong* slave ships of the British Empire. Both were important slave vessels in the history of the British abolitionist movement in revealing to the public the horrors of the slave trading business. The comparison of the *Zong* to the Brookes provides valuable information on the unique individualities of the *Zong* ship. The article also reveals how the *Zong* case was utilized to raise awareness of the slave trade.

Melvyn Brown, Vincent Brown, Bronwen Everill, and Jake Subryan Richards. "The Zong Massacre." In *Our Time* (podcast). November 26th, 2020. Accessed August 5th, 2021. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/m000pqbz>.

This podcast is one of the first sources I utilized to learn about the *Zong* massacre. The podcast introduces various guests who have their own unique historical interpretation of the event as well as key facts that are important to note. This podcast helped create the outline and develop my own historical argument on the *Zong* massacre.

"The Story of the Zong Slave Ship: A Mass Murder Masquerading as an Insurance Claim." *The Guardian*, January 19th, 2021. Accessed February 10th, 2022. <https://www.theguardian.com/law/2021/jan/19/the-story-of-the-zong-slave-ship-a-mass-masquerading-as-an-insurance-claim>.

This news article provides a modern interpretation of the *Zong* massacre, concluding the article with the fact that slavery still exists in our world to this day, and we must still work to fight for and protect our human rights. This article provides a new perspective and interpretation of the *Zong* and its legacy.

Phillip, M. NourbeSe. *ZONG!* Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2011.

This book of poems all focuses on the events of the *Zong*, with each poem focusing on a different aspect of the event. Some poems describe the events of the *Zong*, while others describe the event through a salve on the ship, a crew member, or even inanimate objects such as the ocean or the sky. Each poem utilizes a different structure and form, having its own unique take on the historical event.

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The series of poems help visualize the events of the *Zong* on a more personal and poetic level than just historical facts.

Krikler, Jeremy. "A Chain of Murder in the Slave Trade: A Wider Context of the Zong Massacre." *International Review of Social History* 57, no. 3 (2012): 393–415. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26394540>.

This article, instead of focusing on the events of the *Zong* in terms of the law and commercial logic of the British slave trade, provides a unique angle towards the massacre through the culture and context of the slave trade. This article adds another perspective on the event with rich contexts in the background of the slave trade.

Langten, John, and Paul Laxton. "Parish Registers and Urban Structure: The Example of Late-Eighteenth Century Liverpool." *Urban History Yearbook* [5] (1978): 74–84. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44609071>.

This journal article describes the boroughs and parish of Liverpool as well as the background of late 18<sup>th</sup> century Liverpool. This article provides valuable context on the coastal city and its extensive involvement in the Atlantic Slave Trade.

Lascelles, E.C.P. *Granville Sharp and The Freedom of Slaves in England*. London, England: Oxford University Press, 1928.

This book focuses on the story of Granville Sharp and his abolitionist efforts to bring freedom to the slaves in England with valuable background on Sharp and the challenges he faced during his abolitionist efforts.

Linden, Marcel van der. "Unanticipated Consequences of 'Humanitarian Intervention': The British Campaign to Abolish the Slave Trade, 1807-1900." *Theory and Society* 39, no. 3/4 (2010): 281–98. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40587535>.

This journal article traces the development of the British campaign to abolish slavery, starting with the abolishment of the slave trade in 1807 to the eventual abolishment of slavery at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The article provides information on the challenges faced by the abolitionist movement in Great Britain as well as the consequences that followed.

Longmore, Jane. "Civic Liverpool, 1680-1800," in *Liverpool 800. Culture, Character & History*. Liverpool, England: Liverpool University Press, 2006.

This section of the book provides the background of Civic Liverpool from 1680-1800 including the story about the city of Liverpool and its involvement in the Atlantic Slave trade in addition to the context of the slave trade in Great Britain during the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries.

McD. Beckles, Hilary. *Britain's Black Debt: Reparations for Caribbean Slavery and Native Genocide*. Kingston, Jamaica: University of the West Indies Press, 2013.

This book follows the development of Caribbean slavery and the transatlantic slave trade, concluding that Britain has a case of reparations to answer, which the Caribbean should litigate. This book provides information on the consequences and long-term effects of slavery on Great Britain and the section on the *Zong* massacre provides further details about the historical event.

Mohamud, Abdul and Robin Whitburn. "Britain's involvement with New World Slavery and the transatlantic slave trade." British Library, June 21st, 2018. <https://www.bl.uk/restoration-18th-century-literature/articles/britains-involvement-with-new-world-slavery-and-the-transatlantic-slave-trade>.

This article describes the history of the Atlantic slave trade, starting from the 16<sup>th</sup> century to the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and Britain's involvement with New World slavery. The article offers various primary source pictures to trace the historical trajectory of the slave trade. The article provides interesting pictures that are referenced in the appendix which provides some details on the development of the transatlantic slave trade before the events of the *Zong*.



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Myers, Garfield. "The Zong Massacre." *Jamaica Observer*, August 6th, 2017.

[https://www.jamaicaobserver.com/news/the-zong-8230-236-years-later-a-story-of-mass-murder-fuels-hope\\_106855](https://www.jamaicaobserver.com/news/the-zong-8230-236-years-later-a-story-of-mass-murder-fuels-hope_106855).

This article provides a modern interpretation of the events of the *Zong* through a Jamaican reporter, rather than just a British reflection on the historical killing.

Oldham, John. *English Common Law in the Age of Mansfield*. North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 2005.

This book describes the English law courts of the 18<sup>th</sup> century as well as Lord Mansfield, Chief Justice of the Court of King's Bench, the dominant judicial force of the time. The book provides great insight into the legal beliefs and laws of 18<sup>th</sup>-century Britain, which helped develop my own historical interpretation as to why certain people held certain stances in the legal debates.

Richardson et al. *Liverpool and Transatlantic Slavery*. Liverpool, England: Liverpool University Press, 2007.

This book provides a comprehensive survey of the links between the city of Liverpool and the development of transatlantic slavery in Great Britain. This book provides valuable background information on the slave trade as well as context on the introduction of the slave trade in Britain and Liverpool.

Sherrard, Owen Aubrey. *Freedom From Fear; The Slave and His Emancipation*. Santa Barbara, CA: Greenwood Press, 1959.

This book describes the history of slavery and the development of abolitionist movements that eventually culminated in the emancipation of all slaves. The book provides valuable background context to slavery, not pertaining just to Great Britain.

Walker, Andrew. "From Private Sermon to Public Masterpiece: J. M. W. Turner's 'The Slave Ship' in Boston, 1876-1899." *Journal of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston* 6 (1994): 4-13.  
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/20519760>.

This journal article describes the story and history behind J.M.W. Turner's "The Slave Ship." This article connected me to the details of the *Zong* massacre after seeing the painting in person at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. The article provides information on the legacy of the *Zong* and the long-term effects of the historical event.

Walvin, James. *Black Ivory*. London, England: HarperCollins, 1992.

This book recounts the history of African slavery in the British colonies of the West Indies and North America with valuable information on the social history of slavery in Britain. This book offers rich contexts to understand the views towards slavery before the *Zong* and how they shifted after the events of the *Zong*.

Walvin, James. *Britain's Slave Empire*. Gloucestershire, England: Tempus Publishing, 2000.

This book retells the story of how the slave trading business was introduced to Great Britain including the logistics behind the slave trading journeys, the trading rules, and the experiences of slaves in bondage and as freedmen. The book explains how slavery changed the cultural aspect of British life.

Walvin, James. Email Interview. February 10<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

James Walvin is the Professor of History Emeritus at the University of York. Professor Walvin has published various works on slavery and the slave trade, specifically the events of the *Zong* and the factors that led up to the abolishment of the slave trade in Great Britain. Through a series of email interviews, he offers various insights into the impact of the *Zong* on history and its legacy.

Walvin, James. *England, Slaves, and Freedom, 1776-1838*. Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 1986.

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This book follows the historical trajectory of slavery in England from 1776 to 1838. It follows the period exactly after the events of the *Zong*, leading to the ultimate culmination of the abolition of the slave trade in Great Britain. This book discusses the legacy of the *Zong* and both the long-term and short-term consequences of the event as well as the abolition of the slave trade.

Walvin, James. *Making the Black Atlantic: Britain and the African Diaspora*. London, England: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2016.

This book describes Britain's role in the African diaspora, its origins, process, and transformation. It also describes the impact of slavery on Britain and the deeply rooted British interest in the slave trading business. The book provides the viewpoint of the British towards slavery as well as the consequences on both Britain and the Africans.

Walvin, James. *The Zong: A Massacre, The Law & The End of Slavery*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

This book provides an in-depth analysis of the *Zong* massacre, starting with the background of the ship to the abolition of slavery and the legacy of the *Zong*. This book offers a comprehensive overview of the massacre which helps direct my research to other primary and secondary sources through its notes and bibliography.

Wise, Steven M. *Though the Heavens May Fall*. Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2005.

This book describes the legal trials of the *Zong* massacre, leading up to the decision laid by Lord Mansfield that would set in motion the abolition movements in both England and the United States. The book provides great information on the legal debates of the *Zong* as well as the following abolition movements.