

The slave trade between West Africa and Europe's transatlantic colonies was established by the Portuguese for their Atlantic possessions in the late 15th century and extended to the Americas by the Spanish and Dutch in the 16th century. Britain's early colonies in the first half of the 17th century drew on this existing system, but by the 18th century Britain had established itself as the leading slaving nation.

The slave-trade and slavery is the history which binds Britain, the Caribbean and Africa – it is part of our connected, although grossly unequal, past. It is this we hope to remember through this exhibition.

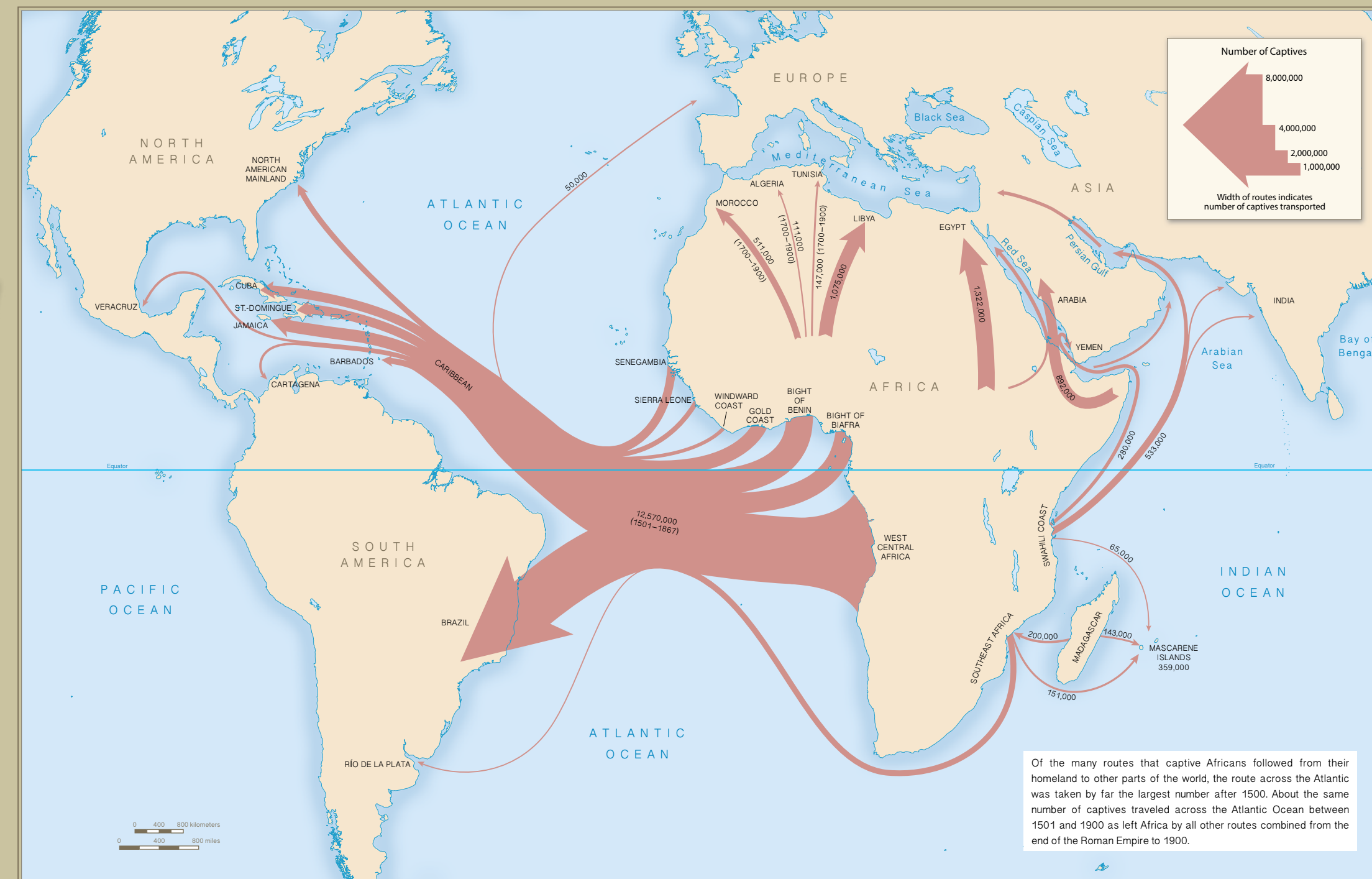
On arrival in the Caribbean, some enslaved people were sold in direct consignments to plantation owners or auctioned in public markets. Others were bought by slave factors and kept for several months or even years in urban pens where they underwent a process called 'seasoning', intended to acclimatise them to both the physical ravages of disease and the psychological trauma of their enslavement. Slave factors were then able to sell these 'seasoned' enslaved people at a considerable premium.

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An account of the sale of  
enslaved people in Antigua in 1787  
from the papers of James Rogers,  
merchant of Bristol.

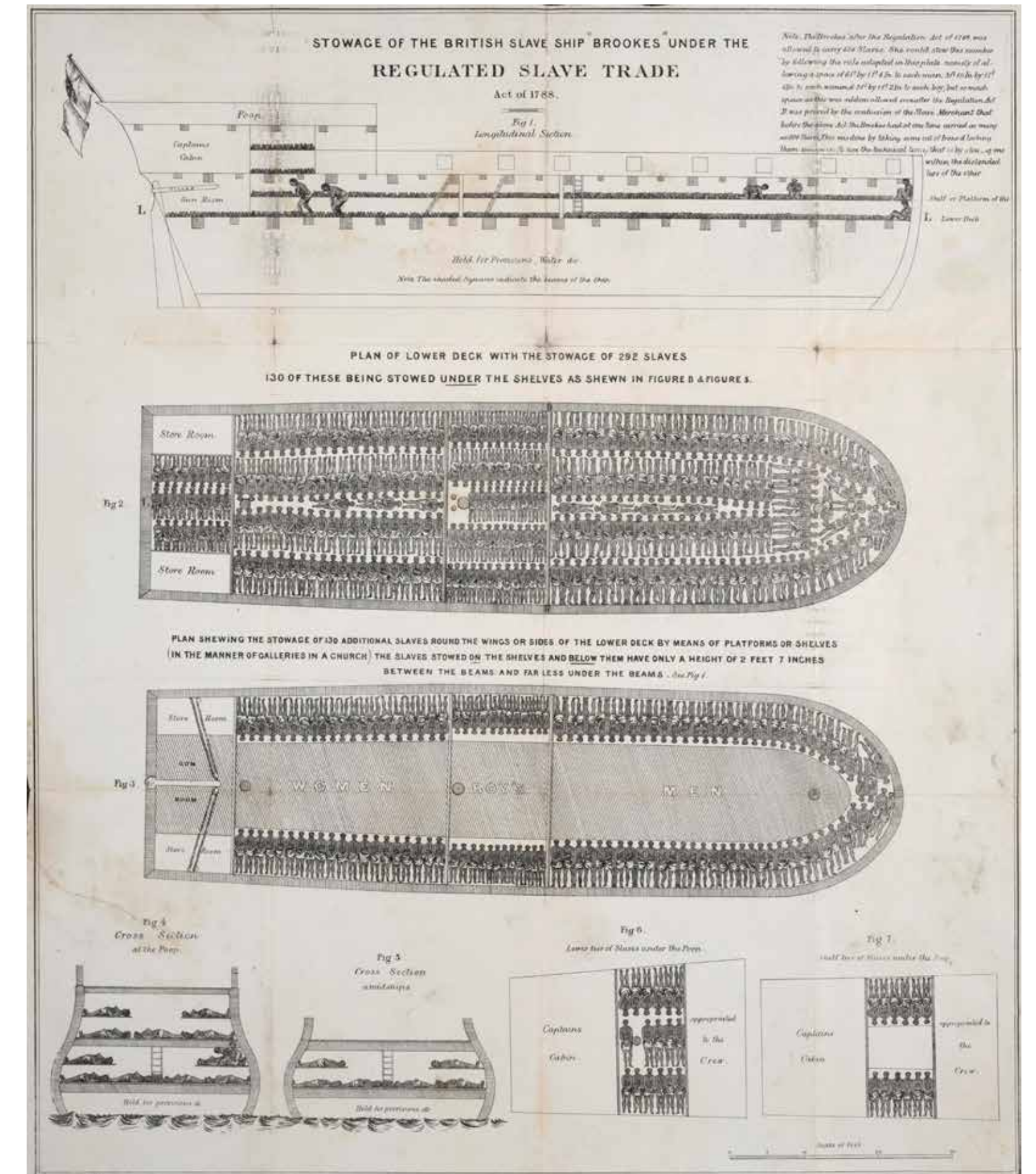
# THE SLAVE TRADE

Current estimates suggest that over four centuries at least 12.5 million people were captured in Africa and boarded onto ships bound for the New World. British ships carried at least 3.2 million enslaved people. At the peak of its activity in the half-century before the abolition of the British slave-trade in 1807, Britain accounted for 40 per cent of the whole traffic in enslaved human beings between Africa and the Americas.



**'Overview of the slave trade: Out of Africa'** from David Eltis and David Richardson, *Atlas of the Transatlantic Slave Trade* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010).

This plan is of the ship, *Brookes*, which is known to have carried more than 600 enslaved people on a single voyage living in atrocious conditions.



'Plan and sections of a slave ship' from Carl B. Wadstrom, *An Essay on Colonization, particularly applied to the Western coast of Africa* (1794–5).