Slavery DBQ

Background: Stanley M. Elkins, a famous historian who wrote *Slavery: A Problem in American Institutional and Intellectual Life* (1959), argued that the harsh conditions of American slavery stripped slaves of their native African identities, prevented them from having strong social and family relationship, and reduced them to dependent child-like laborers who were emasculated and unable to think for themselves. However, recent historical scholarship has reexamined the lives of those born into slavery and has begun to focus on their religious, social, cultural and intellectual identities. Many historians now conclude that individuals born into slavery had the power to shape their own world and were not merely objects of oppression. Historians are now analyzing slavery with a more broadened perspective, looking at not just slave treatment, but the creation of slave societies as well. Yet, in doing so, some critics believe that society may lose sight of how oppressive and degrading American slavery really was. You will need to wrestle with these issues as you frame your response to the prompt.

Prompt: To what extent was slavery in the New World dehumanizing? Use the documents AND knowledge from this week’s lessons.

**Document 1**


Background information on Frederick Douglass: <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part4/4p1539.html>

**Document 2**



Background information on Josiah Henson: <http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/henson49/summary.html>

**Document 3**

Source: PBS (Public Broadcasting Service, funded by U.S. government) Image, “Triangular” Trade

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 **Document 4**

Source: Eighteenth-century painting (estimated 1785-1795), from the Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Art Museum (VA)

Early African American Wedding Ceremony

Artist: John Rose, South Carolina plantation owner



**Document 5**

John Woolman, Quaker, in *Considerations on the Keeping of Negroes* (1754)

Suppose that our ancestors and we had been exposed to constant servitude in the more servile and inferior employments of life; that we had been destitute of the help of reading and good company; that amongst ourselves we had had few wise and pious instructors; that the religious amongst our superiors seldom took notice of us; that while others in ease had plentifully heaped up the fruit of our labour, we had received barely enough to relieve nature, and being wholly at the command of others had generally been treated as a contemptible, ignorant part of mankind. Should we, in that case, be less abject that they are now?

Quaker community at Germantown, Pennsylvania (c. 1750)

What thing on the world can be done worse towards us, then if men should rob or steal us away, and sell us for slaves to strange countries, separating husbands from their wives and children. Being now this is not done at that manner, we will be done at, therefore we contradict and are against this traffic of men’s bodies.

Background information on Quaker’s beliefs, with regards to slavery: <http://www.pbs.org/thisfarbyfaith/journey_1/p_7.html>

**Document 6**

Virginia slave laws:

1627: Christian baptism may not alter conditions of servitude.
1669: The death of a slave during punishment shall not be accounted felony.
1691: Interracial sexual conduct shall be prohibited.

**Document 7**

Alexander Falconbridge, a British surgeon on several slave ships,
provides a description of the Middle Passage in *The African Slave Trade* (1788)

The hardships and inconveniences suffered by the Negroes during the passage are scarcely to be enumerated or conceived. It frequently terminates in death, especially among the women. But the exclusion of the fresh air is among the most intolerable. During the voyages I made, I was frequently witness to the fatal effects of this exclusion of fresh air. I will give one instance, as it serves to convey some idea, though a very faint one, of their terrible sufferings.

Some wet and blowing weather having occasioned the port-holes to be shut and the grating to be covered, fluxes and fevers among the Negroes ensued. While they were in this situation, I frequently went down among them till at length their room became so extremely hot as to be only bearable for a very short time. But the excessive heat was not the only thing that rendered their situation intolerable. The deck, that is the floor of their rooms, was so covered with the blood and mucus which had proceeded from them in consequence of the flux, that it resembled a slaughter-house. It is not in the power of the human imagination to picture a situation more dreadful or disgusting. Numbers of the slaves having fainted, they were carried upon deck where several of them died and the rest with great difficulty were restored. It had nearly proved fatal to me also[;]...it was only with assistance I could get back on deck. The consequence was that I soon after fell sick of the same disorder from which I did not recover for several months.