

Essential Question: Did the Age of Exploration do more harm than good?

I believe the explorers did more bad than good during the Age of Discovery based mainly on ship cruelty. From the source by Vasco de Gama and the Calicut Incident (1503), “captain-major commanded them to cut off the hands and ears and noses of all the crews, and put all that into one of the small vessels” “all the Indians had been thus executed, he ordered their feet to be tied together, as they had no hands with which to untie them: and in order that they should not untie them with their teeth he ordered them to strike upon their teeth with staves, and they knocked them down their throats” Vasco de Gama was trying to show his right as Captain and keep the natives in line. By cutting the hands, ears, and noses off the crew, Vasco knew they couldn’t hear any longer and try to escape. By knocking the teeth out also, it ensures they can’t untie themselves to escape. Vasco did this all for fun, and started chaos.

A second reason why the explorers did more bad is kidnapping children to be slaves. An narrative article by Venture Smith, talks about being kidnapped at the age of 6, where he was sold to the steward on a slave ship and brought to Connecticut. Venture wrote “In order to purchase his wife and sons, he fished, sailed on a whaler, ferried wood from Long Island to Rhode Island, and raised watermelons”. Cruelty was so inflamed then, he was forced to purchase his own family once he became a free man. Life was a struggle, that’s for sure. As a 6 year old boy, uncertain of the world, you’re forced to live a life of labor. You do as the Army and soldiers say, you work hard as a slave, no matter how hard the work is, if not; you will be sold, treated horribly, or killed.

A third reason why the explorers did more bad is the Brookes Slave Ship. On the ship deck, the slaves were lined up side by side, squished together as tight as possible. Each person was insured a certain amount of space, but it was not much. “6ft by 1ft 4in to each man, 5ft 10in by 1ft 4in to each woman, 5ft by 1 ft 2in to each boy, 4ft 6in by 1ft for a girl.” Just enough space to lie down and never move until instructed to do so by the Captain. If you refuse to get up or listen to orders, you will be punished by a shot to the head in front of everyone, or thrown overboard with the rest of the chained people you’re connected to. It is pure torture. You are forced to lie in the waste of every slave on your ship, throw up, poo, pee, you name it. Thousands of people crammed together as tight as possible, with nothing to do but take the torture and pain, or you’re dead.

Citation:

A Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Venture, A Native of Africa (New London, Conn., 1798; expanded ed., Hamden, Conn., 1896).

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H. E. J. Stanley, ed., The Three Voyages of Vasco de Gama (London: The Hakluyt Society, 1869), pp. 328-332.