

“A Portrait of Olaudah Equiano”

Performance by Alexander D Great © PRS, 2019 (4/23/19)

ITEM 1 A Portrait of Olaudah Equiano through song, lyrical verse and Excerpts from his book.

ITEM 2 *THE INTERESTING NARRATIVE OF THE LIFE OF OLAUDAH EQUIANO, OR GUSTAVUS VASSA, THE AFRICAN. WRITTEN BY HIMSELF.*

ITEM 3 Slave song *circa* 1775 (Massa buy me – one verse)

ITEM 4 Excerpts from Equiano’s narrative.

(on slavery) Let the polished and haughty European recollect that his ancestors were once like the Africans, uncivilized and even barbarous. Did Nature make them inferior to their sons? and should they too have been made slaves? Every rational mind answers, “No.”

(on the Middle Passage) The closeness of the place, and the heat of the climate, added to the number in the ship... almost suffocated us...so that the air soon became unfit for respiration, from a variety of loathsome smells, and brought on a sickness among the slaves, of which many died, thus falling victims to the improvident avarice, as I may call it, of their purchasers. This wretched situation was again aggravated by the galling of the chains, now become insupportable; and the filth of the necessary tubs, into which the children often fell, and were almost suffocated. The shrieks of the women, and the groans of the dying, rendered the whole a scene of horror almost inconceivable.

ITEM 5 Poetic account - Stanza 1

Olaudah Equiano’s Narrative Decries a life
none should be forced to live. Deploring acts
unmatched in knavery Of selling humans into
slavery, Henry Pascal, a trader in that game,
Gave him Gustavus Vassa for a name.
Kidnapped with his sister from their village,
Both victims of that barbarous pillage, They
were separated eventually And he transported
to a new country. From time to time he dwelt
on England’s shore, Served in the navy during

the sev'n years war. He learned a little English while at sea. And the Guerins, his master's family, Helped him to be baptized and learn to write, To read the good book and to see the light.

ITEM 6 Calypso verse 1 and Chorus

Equiano, you have travelled this world over
You went to interesting places like
Gibraltar, The Caribbean, Georgia and
Pennsylvania England, Scotland, Holland
and Nova Scotia Turkey, Italy, Portugal and
Jamaica Mosquito Coast down in Central
America, Later visiting New York and
Philadelphia
Becoming a successful trader and
publisher.

(Chorus) The interesting narrative of Olaudah Equiano Was published so future generations would read it and know About this outstanding African, a very successful businessman And an author whose work is still in print to this day A true hero of yesterday...Olaudah Equiano.

ITEM 7 Excerpts from Equiano's narrative

(On slavers) *For I will not suppose that the dealers in slaves are born worse than other men. No; it is the fatality of this mistaken avarice, that it corrupts the milk of human kindness and turns it to gall. And, had the pursuits of those men been different, they might have been as generous, as tender-hearted, and just, as they are unfeeling, rapacious, and cruel.*

(On reaching Monserrat) *At the sight of this land of bondage, a fresh horror ran through all my frame, and chilled me to the heart. My former slavery now rose in dreadful review to my mind, and displayed nothing but misery, stripes, and chains; and in the first paroxysm of my grief, I called upon God's thunder, and his avenging power, to direct the stroke of death to me, rather than permit to become a slave, and to be sold from lord to lord.*

ITEM 8 Poetic account - Stanza 2

Baptized in St. Margaret's church, Westminster,
Strengthened Olaudah in his endeavor. At
length promoted to able seaman, Then sold by
Pascal to captain Doran. Re-sold to traders
several times again, He observed by their
hands the sin of Cain. In the Bahamas he
saved all but one Of a ship's crew with slaves
and 'twas well done. The captain was at fault
from ignorance Coupled with a superior
arrogance. Another of his owners, Robert King
Taught Equiano buying and selling, Instructing
him in skills required for trade. In this way was
his manumission made. The time it took was
long and onerous, Back then, being free and
Black was dangerous,

ITEM 9 Calypso verse 2 and Chorus

After years serving Pascal, in contentment, Sold on to
Captain James Doran caused resentment. Going to
Monserrat, something you could not prevent, You might
have felt that you had earned God's punishment Though
subsequent owners were often benevolent You had no
choice where in the world you might be sent You
experienced the North Pole's freezing element Asking
the Lord to save you in your predicament.

(Chorus)

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businessman And an author whose work is still in print to
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ITEM 10 Excerpts from Equiano's narrative

(on saving the ship's crew) *I could not help thinking, that, if any of these people had been lost, God would charge me with their lives; which, perhaps, was one cause of my labouring so hard for their preservation; and indeed every one of them afterwards seemed so sensible of the service I had rendered them, that while we were on the key I was a kind of chieftain amongst them.*

(on becoming a freed slave) *Hitherto I had thought only slavery dreadful; but the state of a free negro appeared to me now equally so at least, and in some respects even worse, for they live in constant alarm for their liberty; and even this is but nominal, for they are universally insulted and plundered without the possibility of redress; for such is the equity of the West Indian laws, that no free negro's evidence will be admitted in their courts of justice.*

ITEM 11 Poetic account – Stanza 3

Traders took goods whilst refusing to pay
He did not quarrel, but saved day by day
Until the fee was paid and he made free
To roam this world and choose where he would be.
Vassa joined Dr. Charles Irving, scientist
To seek the Northeast passage and assist
A government sponsored expedition
Through Arctic wastes of frozen condition.
He talked to Granville Sharp and others too
Of the Zong massacre and its vile crew,
Who threw their enslaved cargo overboard
Claiming insurance as their just reward;
He published letters in the London Press
To draw attention to that gross excess.
Living in Cambridgeshire late in his life
He took Susannah Cullen as his wife.

ITEM 12 Calypso verse 3 and Chorus

Your attitude made you an astute businessman
Leaving money to the Sierra Leone Mission
Improving the lot of the poor West African
Helping maroons going there from the Caribbean.
The anti - slavery movement grew in Great Britain
You wrote articles about it for

publication Aply supported by the Countess of
Huntingdon Your book became an international
sensation.

(Chorus)

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ITEM 13 Excerpts from Equiano's narrative

(On the arctic expedition) And thus ended our Arctic voyage, to the no small joy of all on board, after having been absent four months; in which time, at the imminent hazard of our lives, we explored nearly as far towards the Pole as 81 degrees north, and 20 degrees east longitude; being much farther, by all accounts, than any navigator had ever ventured before; in which we fully proved the impracticability of finding a passage that way to India.

(on being a free trader) As we sailed to different islands, I laid this money out in various things occasionally, and it used to turn to very good account, especially when we went to Guadaloupe, Grenada, and the rest of the French islands. Thus was I going all about the islands upwards of four years, and ever trading as I went, during which I experienced many instances of ill-usage, and have seen many injuries done to other negroes in our dealings with whites.

ITEM 14 Poetic account Stanza 4

The London Corresponding Society A workers'
group of notoriety Who sought universal suffrage
for all Had 3,000 members honoured to call
Gustavus one of their best supporters. His
marriage was blessed with two young daughters
The eldest of whom, Anna, sadly died. The
younger, Joanna, became the bride Of Henry
Bromley. Sons of Africa Named Vassa to be a
leading member Of that London – based
abolitionist Group of Africans who did persist In
seeking justice for one another, Saying "Am I not

a man and a brother?" Those words inscribed on that medallion, Josiah Wedgewood's kneeling African.

ITEM 15 Calypso verse 4 and Chorus

Gustavus, You had deep spirituality And were baptized after you found Christianity Trying your best to live truly and righteously You became a symbol of real humanity. Speaking out against mankind's worst depravity You said the slave trade corrupted morality, And while you doubted you would ever see liberty You still believed in God's infinite mercy.

(Chorus)

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ITEM 16 Excerpts from Equiano's narrative

(On the future) Population, the bowels, and surface of Africa, abound in valuable and useful returns; the hidden treasures of centuries will be brought to light and into circulation. Industry, enterprise, and mining, will have their full scope, proportionably as they civilize. In a word, it lays open an endless field of commerce to the British manufacturers and merchant adventurers. The manufacturing interest and the general interests are synonymous. The Abolition of slavery would be in reality an universal good.

I hope to have the satisfaction of seeing the renovation of liberty and justice resting on the British government, to vindicate the honour of our common nature.

ITEM 17 Poetic account Stanza 5

The narrative he wrote was his mission To force cruel enslavement's abolition He left some funds to help Sierra Leone And

some to help seeds of truth to be sown.
Though he did not see emancipation His
efforts helped it come to fruition. In this
manner Equiano became A man of
distinction and lasting fame.

FINIS