**READING 4: Olaudah Equiano (1789)**

According to his autobiography, Olaudah Equiano was born around 1745 in Africa, kidnapped, and sold into slavery when he was 11. He was a slave in the British West Indies, Virginia, and on various slave ships and British navy ships. He bought his freedom in 1766, married a white Englishwoman in 1792, and died in London in 1797.

Source: Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African* (London: 1789).

The first object which saluted my eyes when I arrived on the coast was the sea, and a slave ship waiting for its cargo. These filled me with astonishment, which was soon converted into terror when I was carried on board. I was immediately handled and tossed up to see if I were sound by some of the crew, and I was now persuaded that they were going to kill me. Their complexions too, differing so much from ours, their long hair and the language they spoke united to confirm me in this belief. Indeed such were the horrors of my views and fears at the moment that I would have exchanged my condition with that of the meanest slave in my own country. I looked round the ship and saw a multitude of black people of every description chained together, every one of their countenances expressing dejection and sorrow, I no longer doubted my fate; and quite overpowered with horror and anguish, I fell motionless on the deck and fainted.

I was not long suffered to indulge in my grief; I was soon put down under the decks, and there I received such a salutation in my nostrils as I had never experienced in my life; so that the loathesomeness of the stench and crowding together I became so sick that I was not able to eat. I now wished for the last friend, death, to relieve me; soon to my grief, two of the white men offered eatables, and on my refusing to eat, one of them held me fast by the hands and tied my feet while the other flogged me severely.

In a little time after, amongst the poor chained men I found some of my own nation which in a small degree gave ease to my mind. I inquired what was to be done with us; they gave me to understand we were to be carried to these white people's country to work for them. The white people looked and acted in so savage a manner; for I had never seen among my people such instances of brutal cruelty, and this not only shown toward us blacks but also to some of the whites themselves. One white man I saw, when we were permitted to be on deck, flogged so unmercifully with a large rope that he died in consequence of it; and they tossed him over the side as they would have done a brute.

After arriving, we were sold like this: On a signal, the buyers rush at once into the yard where the slaves are confined, and make choice of the parcel they like best. The noise and eagerness visible in the buyers increase the apprehensions of the terrified Africans. In this manner are relations and friends separated, most of them never to see each other again. I remember there were several brothers who were sold in different lots; and it was very moving to hear their cries at parting.