I-Essay 4

European economy was completely dependent upon the transatlantic slave trade. The success of competing European nations in the 18th -19th centuries relied on the trafficking of slaves. Human labor was in high demand within the colonies, so slavery was especially popular in the Americas. The down side to having a successful economy within a European empire during this time was the atrocious degradation of Africans, in order to use them for brute manual labor.

What justified “*Negroe Labor*” for those who defended the slave trade (doc 4) was that it was vital in protecting interests for the Mother Country (e.g. Britain). This is entirely true, the rapid economical growth provided by the colonies in the form of “Sugars, Tobaccoes, Rice, Rum, and all other Plantation Produce” was substantial for Europeans. However, the price for sustaining a successful economy is not worth the horrors of the “middle passage” that Africans were forced to undergo.

Beginning in Africa itself, future slaves were torn from their native country, with no hope in returning. They were immediately treated with overwhelming prejudice (doc 2), “the very first salute I had from them was a violent blow on the back part of the head… I then had a rope put about my neck, as had all the women…” Those Europeans did not view blacks as human beings, and performed branding on them as shown on page 80. A clear oxymoron is found in a “Christian slave trader.” Although, as the original constitution drafted excluded blacks in “We the people,” so did most European’s Christian morals.

Yes, a compelling economic argument can be made that the slave trade fueled economic and industrial growth, which fueled competition. (doc 3) “But inattention and interest prevented, for a time the evil from being perceived.” The circumstances of the Africans who found themselves on those boats to cross the Atlantic were of the lowest living accommodations possible.

The terrible life on the ship for so long a period is depicted in doc 2, “so that the air soon became unfit for respiration, from a variety of loathsome smells, and brought on a sickness amongst the slaves, of which many died.” It is also said that they were so tightly packed it was suffocating, and they were chained in those conditions for weeks on end, lucky if they got fresh air, and often chained so that they could not move far, “lest they should leap into the water.” Mortality rates were very high (doc 3), “nearly one-half of the slaves on board, have, sometimes, died.” And, Africans as a culture and people were severely crippled as relatives were separated never to see each other again.

European civilizations could not accommodate for the residue of their economic pursuits. In this case the fuel for European economy, African slave labor, left Africans inconceivably low standards of living. Newton and Pastlethwayt’s contradictory justifications both have solid points. And, after all was said and done, the slave trade did persist. This was because of the easy labor provided by African slaves, and it sustained Europe’s commercial and economical growth as long as the steam engine and other machinery were still un-invented. Though, I believe that the use of manual labor was avoidable. Other systems for carrying out the labor were imaginable. If I were Europe, I would have immediately dismissed any pre-emptive motions to regulate Africans as a means of labor. However, society’s prejudices of the time were in favor of a caste system, and manual labor.