When I began to read about slavery in Africa and the new world, I went in with the assumption that I knew basically everything there was to know about it. People are basically taken prisoner and forced to do unpaid work in appalling conditions, right? It turns out that yes -- that was in fact the basic overview of slavery in modern and colonial times both, but there was much more complexity in the story.

I found it fascinating (and sad) that they would pack the ships so full of their slave laborers that they would die by the hundreds, usually some beginning on the first day. It was said that they were dying of their own stench! I believe it wasn’t the stench but the waste, disease, and stress of the situation, though it wouldn’t surprise me if the stench accounted for deaths through environmental and psychological stress both. Wouldn’t it have been more productive to put less people on the ship and treat them slightly better so they survive the journey and have more hands to work for less effort? It seems like it would be more profitable in the long run.

I was also taken by the cast-like system that would form within the slave groups once working and their skills were differentiated. The general laborers would be the members of the group and the trailed skilled of the group would sometimes begin to form their own groups of the other people. I wasn’t wxactly to the point of understanding the purpose of this but it almost sounded similar to a union of sorts in the modern sense, just without bargaining power. Maybe it was for mental relief banding together as friends or such?

Last, I was shocked to learn that African Kings enslaved Africans too! I had no idea that this was a thing, and immediately thought “Why were the African people always target as slaves throughout most of history?”. This might be a simple to answer question, or very complex in nature, but I’d like to see what the thought process was behind basically the world using African’s as unpaid labor and treated them with disrespect, it couldn’t have only been skin color, right?