

Transcription of 1794 Deposition
From the Collection of the Rhode Island Historical Society

Saint Eustatius

Before his Excellency Joannes Runnels
Governor of the Island of Saint Eustatius
and its dependencies, Colonel of the militia
and President of the Colleges, etc. etc. etc.

Personally appeared Isaac Stockman and Henry Channing Mariners who being duly sworn upon the Holy Evangelists of Almighty God depose and say That they are both natives of Newport in the State of Rhode Island; that they sailed from Acra one of the Danish Settlements on the Coast of Africa [on or] about the fifteenth day of September one thous and seven hundred and eighty nine in the ship Polly belonging to the said Town of Newport in the State of Rhode Island commanded by Captain James D'Wolfe with a Cargo of one hundred and twenty seven slaves; that about ten days after their departure from the Coast of Africa the smallpox made its first appearance in an alarming manner upon one of the female slaves; That in order to prevent this dreadful disorder from spreading and infecting the Ships' Crew which consisted of fifteen white people five only of whom had had it the diseased woman was moved to the main- top where every attention was paid to her and every assistance afforded her, that the Situation they were in would allow. That in the course of Three or Four Days her disorder increased so as to become offensive and to render it dangerous for her to remain on board. That in Latitute, two, North or thereabouts, Captain D'Wolfe being very much alarmed and under great apprehensions called the mate and crew together in order to consult with them upon the Steps to be taken to prevent this dreadful disorder from getting among the Crew and Cargo; he represented to them that it would in all probability be at least fifty or sixty days before they could arrive at the port of their destination; that they had it not in their power to afford any effectual medical assistance to such as might take the disorder; that if it should spread among the Crew and Cargo the negroes must be confined in the hole, where excessive heat would increase the effects of the disease and that a dreadful mortality must inevitably ensue, and to compleat their unfortunate Situation the Slaves they had on board were of a nation famed for Insurrection, so that if the Crew were attacked with the disorder, it would afford them an opportunity to execute any plot they might form, seeing so many of the Crew were under apprehensions for their own personal safety and were likely to become incapable of affording any assistance in navigating the vessel, much less in making resistance, if a revolt should be attempted. Under these circumstances and as the severity of the disorder left no appearance of the woman's recovery, but on the contrary confirmed those who had had the smallpox in the belief that she would did in a short time, no alternative was left to save the Crew amd Cargo, which consisted of one hundred and forty two Souls, but to throw this one,

so dangerously infected, overboard; which was accordingly done, and each of the Crew who had had this disorder together with the Captain joined their assistance in effecting it. The said Isaac Stockman and Henry Channing further [on their Both declare, that this act so far from having been accompanied by malice or wantonness] or for want of due Consideration, the Captain and the whole Crew were equally affected at the Circumstance, which compelled them to adopt this disagreeable alternative, being the only one from which, in their Situation, they could obtain the necessary Relief.

The said Isaac Stockman and Henry Channing do further solemnly declare, that the foregoing deposition has been deliberately read over to them and that they have deposed thereto and subscribed the same without any fee or reward or without any fear dread or compulsion of or from any person whatsoever, but of their own free will and accord, and the same contains the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth.

Sworn to this second day of October
in the Year one thous and Seven hundred
and ninety four.

Before Me,

Joannes Runnels

Isaac Stockman
Henry Channing