

**HIST221**  
**Guide to Responding**  
**Study Guide for Boyrereau Brinch's and Benjamin F. Prentiss's (Benjamin Franklin's) *The Blind African Slave, or Memoirs of Boyrereau Brinch, Nicknamed Jeffrey Brace***

**Main Point Summary/Background:**

Boyrereau Brinch and Benjamin F. Prentiss's (Benjamin Franklin's) *The Blind African Slave, or Memoirs of Boyrereau Brinch, Nicknamed Jeffrey Brace* is more than the memoir of a former African slave and a war veteran but a voice that embodied the hideousness of slavery. Across the book, Brinch and Prentiss examine a large number of themes, including religion, politics, violence, morality, and even love and lust; but above all, this book is a meditation on the theme of humanity. Moreover, *The Blind African Slave* also contains exquisite observations on the life and conduct of the African cultures and how their traditions evolved into a truly African American culture.

**Related Readings:**

This reading is related to the other readings in subunit 4.2 ("Slavery"), but especially to those in sub-subunit 4.2.2, such as Dr. David Eltis's "A Brief Overview of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade: The Enslavement of Africans," and the other readings in sub-subunit 4.2.3 ("Emergence of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade"), such as Dr. David Wheat's "Iberian Roots of the Transatlantic Slave Trade, 1440–1640."

**Instructions:**

Following are excerpts from the reading and sample responses that help to answer the study questions. Review these answers after you have completed the study questions. Highlighting or taking notes while you read paired with later outlining and paraphrasing is an excellent method to ensure comprehension and retention of difficult material.

1. On page 74, Brinch explains how, after being captured by the English slave traders, he was taken to the vessel, where he met with other captured Africans. He tells us how "this group was composed of men, women and children, some little girls and boys, not more than six or seven years of age..."

Still, remember that "the majority of slaves transported to the New World were men; in fact, there were about two to three men for every woman in Central and South America (at this early stage, we do not have any records of African women being transported to North America). This imbalance altered the ratio of adult men to adult women and of working adults to dependents in Africa.

Subsequently, social dynamics were altered in West and Central Africa: Polygamy became more acceptable and prevalent, and traditional male forms of work, such as hunting, fishing, livestock rearing, and clearing of fields became



less practiced, which led directly to a less protein-rich diet and a reduction in agricultural productivity.”<sup>1</sup>

2. In chapter 3, Brinch describes with great detail “the feast of the Sun.” For example, on page 54, he explains how “lambs, kids, gold-fishes, mandrakes and scarlet grapes, are offered up as sacrifices to their God, the Sun, whom they worship as devoutly as christians worship the trinity.” As you probably remember from other courses such as HIST101, sun worship in various forms was exceptionally prevalent in many cultures throughout history. Thus, it is improbable that Brinch’s original religion was a “solar monotheism,” but some form of polytheism in which natural forces and objects of celestial, atmospheric, and earthly nature were identified as divinities.
3. Brinch spends a great deal of time explaining the relationship between the natives and the newcomers. For example, on page 81, he describes how “...many of the English gentlemen had been residents in this town for many months during their stay here they had ingratiated themselves with the natives, whose credulity taught them to believe that they were as honest and innocent as the natives were themselves...” Later, on pages 82–83, the author explains how “...we [the captured Africans] learned by the Interpreter, that the officers were courting some of the women, and were almost idolized by the natives, who were making public feasts for their amusement, and entertainment.”

Clearly, it was better for the English traders to have good relations with the natives and avoid any type of confrontation until the last minute before the capture. Even though the slave traders had more modern weapons, they were outnumbered in a foreign land. Still, Brinch’s description of the relations between Africans and Europeans reminds readers of the naivety and trusting nature of the natives.

4. Do you remember the story of Cain and Abel in the Bible’s Book of Genesis? Cain and Abel were two of the three sons of Adam and Eve. Cain, the eldest, murdered his brother Abel, for which God cursed him. Thus, in this passage, Brinch refers to what it is known as “the curse of Cain” or “the mark of Cain.” In the eighteenth century, many justified racism and slavery by claiming that the “mark” or “curse” of Cain was black skin. Thus, according to this theory, Africans had been cursed by God, and subsequently, they were to be subjected to Christians, who had God’s favor.

On the other hand, many others opposed this racial interpretation of the curse and argued that Cain’s descendants were killed in the great flood; thus, blacks could not have possibly descended from Cain. Subsequently, they were equal to Europeans. This debate regarding Cain’s mark was finally abandoned by the mid-nineteenth century.

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<sup>1</sup> The Saylor Foundation’s “The Atlantic World, 1492–1600” (PDF), p. 35.



5. There are many examples within the first four chapters of the book; however, the clearest is on page 63: "Man, in his native elements would be held to view; their origin and descent would be portrayed; each kingdom and nation would be clearly seen and known, if real distinctions are; the proofs would be strong and convincing; if all mankind were naturally equal, we, however sable, if wise and virtuous, should be on a level with all mankind." Remember sable in this case identifies the color black.
6. This slave narrative was intended for anyone who would be willing to read it. In fact, personal narratives like this one of Boyrereau Brinch were tools used by the antislavery movement to spread its message, particularly throughout North America and Europe.
7. On pages 8 and 9, the author explains how "The Parliament of G. Britain have emancipated their Catholic brethren, the advocates of African freedom have caused the walls of the House of Commons to reverberate the thunder of their eloquence, and a partial emancipation has been effected in their foreign dominions. In America, that spirit of liberty, which stimulated us to shake off a foreign yoke and become an independent nation, caused the New England states to emancipate their slaves, and there is but one blot to tarnish the luster of the American name, which is permitting slavery under a constitution, which declares that "all mankind are naturally and of right ought to be free." In fact, in 1807, the British Parliament passed the Slave Trade Act, a decree which made slave trading illegal throughout the British Empire. In the United States, many antislavists asked for a similar law to be passed in this new nation. However, slavery was an integral part of the U.S. economy, and slavery was not abolished until 1865. Thus, it is very probable that Boyrereau Brinch and Benjamin F. Prentiss's intention when writing this memoir was to collaborate with the antislavery cause by making Brinch's life story available to the general public.

