New York Slavery Records Index
Prospectus
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The purpose of the New York Slavery Records Index (NYSRI) is to assemble a searchable index of records of slavery in New York identifying individual enslaved persons and their owners. New York State has many records and historical studies of slavery beginning in 1623 and ending in 1848, including census records, records of slave trade transactions, cemetery records, birth certifications, manumissions, ship inventories and private narratives and legal records.

Our goal is to deepen the historical documentation of slavery as it was conducted by and experienced by individuals. The database is therefore designed to support search results that combine records from all indexed sources based on search parameters such as the name on an owner, a place name, date ranges, and analytical topics.

As of the end of August 2017 we have indexed over 33,000 records, including all of the head-of-household records identifying slave owners in the censuses of 1790, 1800, 1810, 1820 and 1830,[1] as well as substantial numbers of slave trade transactions, cemetery records, birth certifications, manumissions, ship inventories and private narratives and legal records. But in the prospectus we explain that much more needs to be done.

The website of the project is accessible at:

https://nyslavery.commons.gc.cuny.edu/
General password: "freedom"

The general password is in place while the project is in initial development. We anticipate opening the project to the general public in January 2018

Universities and Slavery: The John Jay College of Criminal Justice Context

Colleges and universities are engaged in initiatives to explore institutional connections to slavery, and Appendix One describes some of these initiatives. Some institutional connections are direct and tangible, contributing to assets and endowments, and supporting the operations of the institutions in past centuries. Other connections involved memorialization – current names of colleges, buildings and programs after persons whose primary historical legacy involved engagement in and/or advocacy for slavery.

While John Jay College of Criminal Justice, founded in 1965, does not have a history of active engagement with slavery of old academic institutions like Georgetown University, Brown University or

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[1] It is frequently reported that slavery ended in New York in 1827. This is true for persons who were enslaved prior to 1799. However, for some of their children, under the 1799 Gradual Abolition Law, there involuntary servitude extended for decades after birth. The U.S. Census of 1830 identifies enslaved person who were probably in this status. This is documented in our database.

the University of Virginia. However, the college is named to honor John Jay, a founding father of the United States and the first Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. This honor must be considered to be a most significant form of memorialization.

When Yale University considered whether to rename Calhoun College, a set of principles were applied to guide the decision.[2] The principles included whether the principal legacies of the person involved are consistent with the mission and values of the university. If we apply that principle to John Jay College of Criminal Justice, we must recognize that John Jay and his family owned slaves. We document this in our database.

We also must recognize that John Jay was also a founder of the New York Manumission Society which advocated for the freeing of enslaved people and actively documented and enforced manumissions once granted. John Jay, as Governor of New York, signed the Act for the Gradual Abolition of Slavery in 1799, which set in motion a process that ultimately ended slavery in New York.[3]

While the gradual schedule of abolition also preserved some enslavements for decades, the provisions of the law were shaped by the composition of the New York State Senate at the time: the majority of the senators were slave-owners.[4] This is another fact we document in our database – naming the Senators who owned slabs and identifying the records that prove it.

We also must recognize that, during his lifetime, well before he became Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, John Jay advocated against slavery. For example, in 1785 we wrote to Benjamin Rush: *"I consider education to be the soul of the republic. II wish to see all unjust and all unnecessary discriminations everywhere abolished, and that the time may soon come when all our inhabitants of every colour and denomination shall be free and equal partakers of our political liberty"[5]*

While this project is not intended to settle this important question of memorialization for John Jay College of Criminal Justice, it is intended to inform the discussion and to also expand understanding of the general history of slavery in New York State. Therefore, our database is not exclusively about John Jay, it is about all of the slave owners and enslaved person in the history of our state.

We are "fierce advocates for justice." But the search for justice must be begin with and be inform by a search for truth. Our goal is to engage in a search for truth which will inform discussion and debate about our history of slavery in the State and City of New York. We believe that while the truth about slavery involves laws, policies, and the acts of public and private institutions, it cannot be fully understood until it is examined as slavery was carried out by and experienced by people – many of whom we can name and remember as individuals.

Scope of the Collection

The purpose of this project is to assemble a searchable index of records of slavery in New York identifying individual enslaved persons and their owners. New York State has many records and

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[2] See http://president.yale.edu/sites/default/files/files/CEPR_FINAL_12-2-16.pdf
[3] For a more complete presentation, see: http://www.columbia.edu/cu/libraries/inside/dev/jay/JaySlavery.html
[4] See https://nyslavery.commons.gc.cuny.edu/2017/07/04/slavery-and-the-new-york-state-senate/
[5] see: http://www.columbia.edu/cu/libraries/inside/dev/jay/JaySlavery.html

historical studies of slavery beginning in 1623 and ending in 1848. The project does not seek to take custody of or manage records, but rather to provide a comprehensive index of the records that exist.

The scope of this project is massive, but a significant part of the work has already been accomplished: more than 33,000 records of enslavement, systematically indexed. By comparison, Columbia University's Columbia and Slavery projects has assembled and placed online two spreadsheets of fewer than 500 names of former Columbia University students, and at least a third of the entries show no documented history of slave-holding in the spreadsheets. The focus of the Columbia is explicitly on the University.

Our focus is on New York State. Our dataset allows people in upstate communities to access evidence of slavery in their local communities. For example, there are more than 2,600 records of slavery in Columbia County.

We do not seek to acquire or directly manage the records we index. Rather we seek to identify and index them so that person interested in a particular slave holder or enslaved person can determine what the records say and where they can be accessed. If the record is available online, we include a link to the record. For example, the Columba University project provides one spreadsheet entry for the DeLancey family – one runaway slave ad. We already identify more than 30 records.

We also seek to identify where the records to facilitate steps to preserve the records. In our search for records of the City of New Rochelle, for example, we learned the City has transferred them to the New Rochelle Library, the Library had transferred them to the Thomas Paine Cottage Museum, and the Museum said then had transferred them to the County Archives, but eventually we located them in the County Historical society.

Another large collection[6] was identified[7] as being archived at the Queens College (CUNY) library. The library reports, on its website, that the collection is gone: *"The Library no longer holds the Queens College Historical Document Collection. Although print indexes and other sources may still list the collection as a resource, it was disbanded many years ago and all the materials were moved elsewhere. The library has no record of the current location of any items formerly held in this collection."[8]*

What are the types of records we are indexing?

Colonial Census Records: These are records in O'Callaghan: *The Documentary History of the State of New York* for the colonial period up to 1790.They include censuses taken by Dutch and British officials. These include counts of the number of enslaved persons in a jurisdiction, as well as lists of slave owners and enslaved persons by name.

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[6] The Historical Documents Collection at Queens College, New York, held seventy-one reels of microfilmed wills originally deposited in the New York City Surrogate's Court between 1658 and 1879. This collection also held 5,790 estate inventories filed from 1783 to 1844 in the same court. The Historical Documents Collection at Queens College also housed estate inventories filed between 1666 and 1775 (1,080 items), and wills written from 1666 to 1829 from the Court of Appeals at Albany (which contain materials that also pertain to the southern six counties of the state). The manuscript records of the town of Westchester contain slave manumission deeds and registrations of births of slave children: "Manumission of Slaves" May 8, 1787--April 11, 1816, Liber A, Westchester Town Records, microfilm reel TWC2, roll 5, Historical Documents Collection, Queens College, Queens, New York.

[7] See Dr. Vivienne L. Kruger. Ma. M. Phil., Ph.D. BORN TO RUN:The Slave Family in Early New Tork, 1626 to 1827, Chapter 17. http://newyorkslavery.blogspot.com/

[8] See https://library.qc.cuny.edu/collections/historical.php

United States Census: This are the household-level census records for the U.S. Census for the years 1790, 1800, 1801, 1820 and 1830, where the household reports 1 or more slaves living on the premises. Our records include the name of the head of household, who is presumed to be the slave owner, along with the number of slaves, the county or borough, and the locality. These include summary counts of the number of enslaved persons in a jurisdiction

Slave Trade Records: These are records of sales of enslaved persons, including sales of enslaved persons outside of New York State who are recorded as being born in or residing within New York State.These come from a variety of sources because New York did not maintain registries of slave transactions.

Emancipations: These include the records of the New York Manumission Society as well as governmental records where these exist. These records are tagged with "EMN" for emancipation.

Runaway Slave Advertisements and Announcements: These are ads seeking the return of enslaved persons who have escaped from their owners. The ads identify the owners and the enslaved persons.

Birth Registrations: The 1799 Act for the Gradual Abolition of Slavery provided that *"any **child born of a slave** within this state after the fourth day of July next shall be deemed and **adjudged to be born free**: Provided nevertheless. That **such child shall be the servant of the legal proprietor of his or her mother until such servant, if a male, shall arrive at the age of twenty-eight years, and if a female, at the age of twenty-five years."***

It further provided that *"every person being an inhabitant of this state **who shall be entitled to the service of a child born** after the fourth day of July as aforesaid, shall, within nine months after the birth of such child, **cause to be delivered to the clerk of the city or town whereof such person shall be an inhabitant, a certificate in writing containing the name and addition of such master or mistress, and the name, age and sex of every child so born…"***

The above birth records are tagged as "REG" for registrations, identifying children claimed for servitude.

It also provided for the abandonment of the newborn children: "The person entitled to such service may, nevertheless, within one year after the birth of such child, elect to abandon his or her right to such service, by a notification of the same from under his or her hand, and lodged with the clerk of the town or city where the owner of the mother of any such child may reside; in which case **every child abandoned as aforesaid shall be considered as paupers** of the respective town or city where the proprietor or owner of the mother of such child may reside at the time of its birth; **and liable to be bound out by the overseers of the poor** on the same terms and conditions that the children of paupers were subject to before the passing of this act."

These records are tagged as "ABN" which means that the owner separated the child from the mother and presented the child to the overseers of the poor.

Treaty of Paris Records: The Book of Negroes is a hand-written list of more than 3,000 formerly enslaved persons allowed to emigrate from New York for Nova Scotia in 1783 because of their service to the British during the Revolutionary War. Emigration was a guarantee in the Treaty of Paris which officially ended the war. The NY Slavery Records Index includes the records that identify the slave owner

as residing in New York at the time the enslaved person escaped to the British side. These records are tagged with "BON" for the Book of Negroes.

Cemetery Records: Cemetery Records are also included. These records can be challenging as the enslavement status of persons is frequently not clear. Our protocol is to include persons interred in cemeteries that officially claim to include slaves, and to include the records of interred persons who might (based on their birth and death years) have been enslaved, or who might have been subject to servitude based on the 1799 Gradual Abolition law, indicating in the comment section that the status is not resolved. We include persons who are free at the time of death if during their lives they had been enslaved.

Project Design

Because our goal is to deepen the historical documentation of slavery as it was conducted by and experienced by individuals, our database is therefore designed to support search results that combine records from all indexed sources based on search parameters such as the name on an owner, a place name, date ranges, and analytical topics.

The following are definitions of the database fields. The dataset is designed to document information about slave owners, enslaved persons and general census information about slavery in a single dataset. In this way we can see records of slave owners along with records of the people they enslaved.

- Type: Slave Owners (Owner) or Enslaved Persons (Slave) or Census (Census)
  - A census record lists the number of enslaved persons in a locality for a particular year, along the the total population for the locality when it exists.
  - When a record contains slave and owner information it is recorded as a slave record. All slave records include the owner identification when it exists.
- RecYear: The year of the information in the record
- Ocode: A unique code for the slave owner
- Olast: Last name of the Owner
- Ofirst:First name of the owner
- Oborn: Year of birth of the owner
- Odied: Year of death of the owner
- Oaddress: The street address of the owner, taking from old street directories.
- CountyBoro: The County or Borough of the owner. When county identities and boundaries have changed, if possible we code the current county of the locality not the historical county.
- Locality: The town or city
- Slaves: The number of slaves of the owner, typically from a census.
- Sm: The number of adult male slaves
- Sf: The number of adult female slaves
- Smc: The number of male child slaves
- Sfc: The number of female child slaves
- Scode: A unique code to identify the slave
- Slast: Last name of the slave. When the last name is not capitalized, this is the last name of the slave owner and the slave was not originally documented with a last name.
- Sfirst: First name of the slave
- Sborn: Birth year of the slave
- Sdied: Year of death of the slave

- GenPop: The number of people in the area of a census report. This field is only used for census records.
- Document: The source document for the record. We have a bibliography which provides more information about the source document.
- URL: A website address for more information, or for access to the document referenced.
- Comment: Additional information about the record
- Tags: These are codes that, when used in a search, identify a special circumstance or issue. The following is a list of the tags:

    - BON: These are records of slaves who escaped to the British during the Revolutionary War and who subsequently emigrated to Canada as free persons.
    - LSTD: The are records of slave transactions in Louisiana where the enslaved person was born in New York. Their enslavement in Louisiana may have been illegal in New York.
    - RAN: These are records based on runaway slave notices and ads.
    - ABN: These are records of babies born to enslaved women who were officially abandoned by the slave owner and placed up for foster care by the local government.
    - SALE: This is a record of a slave trade transaction.
    - EMN: This is a record of an emancipation of a slave.
    - CEM: A cemetery marker or record.
    - FRE: These are records of free black persons, some of whom may also be identified as slave holders, or former enslaved persons whose records are being followed after their freedom to facilitate genealogical research.
    - SEN1790: These are NY State Senators in 1790 who were slave holders.
    - WILL: A last testament, included because it identified enslaved persons and either emancipated them or assigned them to another owner.
    - DESC: A record of a descendant

The same record format is used for all types of information, and the relevant fields are completed based on the information available.

Development Challenges

The initial development of this project has been supported by the John Jay College MPA Programs through a small student search assistantship program. As of the end of August 2017 we have indexed over 33,000 records, including all of the head-of-household records identifying slave owners in the censuses of 1790, 1800, 1810, 1820 and 1830, as well as substantial numbers of slave trade transactions, cemetery records, birth certifications, manumissions, ship inventories and private narratives and legal records

However, there are significant challenges for future development of the project.

Locating and Coding More Records: The first 33,000 records have been easier to find and code. Locating additional records will require more field research, and the interpretation of the records will be more challenging when they are in their original form.

Validating and Checking the Records: Most of the records of slavery are hand written, and the people creating the records had varying level of spelling and handwriting proficiency. Often the person creating

the record posed question to people who did not spell well, and who may have had incomplete information about how many slaves were owned, the names and ages of the slaves, etc. There are decisions that have to be made in coding the records that should be reviewed and validated to the extent possible.

Enhancing the Website Platform: Presently the website is hosted on the CUNY Commons, and the database in hosted with a private database management service. As the project scales and is open to public access, this platform may not be able to handle the traffic. Furthermore, a more sophisticated platform may be needed if we want to present information in visual formats such as maps.

Research Projects: We have been able to do some relatively simple research projects, but the database will facilitate more probing and informative research, which may warrant the participation of faculty with specialized skills and the involvement of students in more time-consuming field research activities. These research projects would position John Jay College of Criminal Justice at the forefront of information-based scholarship about slavery in New York and across the nation. Research questions could include:

- What is the general state of the records we have located, and what can be cone to preserve them?
- What happened to the enslaved persons who emigrated to Nova Scotia after the Revolutionary War?
- Why are their slave trade transaction records in the Louisiana Slave Trade Database for enslaved persons born in New York?
- What existing buildings in New York City and across the State were occupied by enslaved people?
- Can we document more instances of enslaved people in New York State being "sold south" when the eventual abolition of slavery in New York State was becoming more likely?

Public Service and Public Education: Once the website is opened for public access, we are likely to receive requests for assistance from communities seeking to understand their records, and perhaps requests from other jurisdictions (other states) to replicate the project. Our small team will be unable to respond to these requests.

Genealogical Research: The database is structured so that we can track records of an enslaved person following his or her emancipation, and to identify descendants. This will facilitate the ability of families to connect their ancestry research to our records of an enslaved ancestor.

Appendix One
Universities and Slavery

The following is a preliminary review of some of the prominent projects by universities and colleges to confront their histories of slavery.

These are important projects for these universities. The New York Slavery records index is different because a) it focuses on slavery for the entire state not just John Jay College of Criminal Justice; b) it is designed as an ongoing project, not a one-time report; and c) while it does present and interpret information about John Jay both has a slave-holder and as a reformer who advocated for manumission and abolition, it is not designed to primarily focus on John Jay.

Harvard and Slavery: http://www.harvardandslavery.com/

Concept: This is the workproduct of a class and research project by two professors and a set of students. It is not an ongoing project, and it focuses primarily on Harvard.

Quote: Harvard University was the first institution of higher learning in colonial America. Founded in 1636 as a training ground for aspiring ministers, it capitalized on this early start and became during the nineteenth century the nation's most influential university, and by the middle of the twentieth century, arguably the world's. Not surprisingly, then, Harvard's four centuries' long career is tightly connected to the history of New England, the United States and the Atlantic World on whose most dynamic eastern edge it was perched. Notwithstanding a deafening silence on the topic in most remembrances of this great university, Harvard's history entails a whole range of connections to slavery.

Yale Slavery and Abolition Portal: http://slavery.yale.edu/

Concept: The site presents information about Yale and Slavery, and it presents reports and information about the Decision to rename Calhoun College. It is not an ongoing project and focuses primarily on Yale.

Quote: This site is designed to help researchers and students find primary sources related to slavery, abolition, and resistance within the university's many libraries and galleries.

Columbia and Slavery: http://columbiaandslavery.columbia.edu

Concept: This website describes there results of a class devoted to researching slavery and the university, and a paper by a faculty member resulting from the courses. It is not an ongoing project, and it focuses primarily on Columbia. The project developed a small database to identify Columbia faculty and students who were slave-owners or who took public positions about slavery..

Quote: This website provides the University community and the general public with the results of research involving Columbia's historic relationship with the institution of slavery. … The Columbia University and Slavery project explores a previously little-known aspect of the university's history – its connections with slavery and with antislavery movements from the founding of King's College to the end of the Civil War.

The Georgetown Slavery Archive: http://slaveryarchive.georgetown.edu/

Concept: This website describes past and ongoing efforts to study slavery and Georgetown University. It is an ongoing project, but it focuses primarily on Georgetown.

Quote: The Georgetown Slavery Archive is a repository of materials relating to the Maryland Jesuits, Georgetown University, and slavery.

President's Commission on Slavery and the University of Virginia: http://slavery.virginia.edu/

Concept: This website focuses on a report commissioned by the President of the University concerning memorialization of slavery. It is not an ongoing project, and it focused primary on the University.

Quote: Provide Advice and Recommendations to the President on the commemoration of the University of Virginia's historical relationship with slavery and enslaved people.

Brown University Slavery and Justice:
http://www.brown.edu/Research/Slavery_Justice/documents/SlaveryAndJustice.pdf

Concept: This website presents the results of project to document slavery conducted by Brown University and its benefactors. It is not at ongoing project and it focuses primary on Brown University but does present information about slavery in New England.

Quote: We cannot change the past. But an institution can hold itself accountable for the past, accepting its burdens and responsibilities along with its benefits and privileges. This principle applies particularly to universities, which profess values of historical continuity, truth seeking, and service. In the present instance, this means acknowledging and taking responsibility for Brown's part in grievous crimes.

Appendix Two
Project Development and Support Opportunities

This project is a massive undertaking. While much as been accomplished, much remains to be done, and our future projects will be more time-consuming and challenging. Therefore we welcome support for the project.

In the Prospectus Section on Development Challenges we developed a set of development and research projects that would benefit from support. Support could take the form of student scholarship and research assistantships, funding to support faculty engagement with the project, and funding to underwrite the development and ongoing operation of the technology platform.

Taking a longer view, this project would benefit from a substantial gift that dedicates revenues to te permanent support of the project.