THE LOUISIANA SLAVE DATABASE AND THE LOUISIANA FREE DATABASE:

1719-1820 [1]

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This is a description of and user's guide to these databases. Their usefulness in historical interpretation will be demonstrated in several forthcoming publications by the author including several articles in preparation and in press and in her book, *The African Diaspora in the Americas: Regions, Ethnicities, and Cultures* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, forthcoming 2000).

These databases were created almost entirely from original, manuscript documents located in courthouses and historical archives throughout the State of Louisiana. The project lasted 15 years but was funded for only five of these years. Some records were entered from original manuscript documents housed in archives in France, in Spain, and in Cuba and at the University of Texas in Austin as well. Some were entered from published books and journals. Some of the Atlantic slave trade records were entered from the Harvard Dubois Center Atlantic Slave Trade Dataset. Information for a few records was supplied from unpublished research of other scholars. [2]

Each record represents an individual slave who was described in these documents. Slaves were listed, and descriptions of them were recorded in documents in greater or lesser detail when an estate of a deceased person who owned at least one slave was inventoried, when slaves were bought and sold, when they were listed in a will or in a marriage contract, when they were mortgaged or seized for debt or because of the criminal activities of the master, when a runaway slave was reported missing, or when slaves, mainly recaptured runaways, testified in court. [3] Each coded field contains comparable information about each slave.

The *Louisiana Slave Database* contains 99,419 records and 114 fields. A few examples of these fields are **DOCDATE,** the exact date of the document; **YEAR**, the year of the document; **LOCATION**, the parish (county) of the document; **NAME**, the name of the slave; **NAMETYPE**, which flags African names or names which could be African or European; **SEX**, gender of the slave; **RACE**, racial designation of the slave; **AGE** of the slave when supplied in digits; **AGECATN**, age of slave when supplied in age category; **BIRTHPL**, where the slave was born; **FAMILY**, family relationships of the slave; **SKILLS** and **ILLNESSES** of the slave; **INVVALP**, inventory price; **SALEVALP**, sale price of the slave; **SHIP**, the Atlantic or transshipment slave trade ship upon which the arrived; **CAPTAIN** of the ship; **FROM**, where the ship came from; **ARRIVEDATE**, the date the ship arrived.

The **Louisiana Free Database** records documents involving manumissions of slaves. It contains 4,071 records and 62 fields. With the exception of the slave trade shipping information, it contains all of the fields described above for the Louisiana Slave Database as well as some addition fields. They include **MEANS**, which indicates how the slave was freed; **FREEREL**, which indicates how the freer was related to the slave whose freedom was purchased and a description of the gender, race, and birthplace fo the freer; **CONDITION** placed on the manumission; **GRATUITOUS**, if the master freed the slave with no payment or conditions; **FREED**, if the slave was certainly, probably, possibly freed, or would be freed at

age 30 for the American period; **WHITEDAD**, which shows whether paternity by a white man involved in the manumission was openly acknolwedged, probable, or possible.

These databases will be very useful to genealogists. It is likely that most people and/or families who lived in Louisiana through the year 1820 regardless of racial designation or status can be found in these databases by name. The names of the slaves can be linked to the names of the masters over time. Precise information recorded in every record (entry) includes the exact date and location and, when relevant, the name of the notary which allows the researcher to easily find and copy the original document. Many people owned slaves in early Louisiana. Aside from large slaveholders, many whites and free people of African descent owned one or two slaves. They were often domestic slaves and some of them were blood relatives of their owners. There are fields which indicate if any persons involved in each record was a free person of African descent. Thus, a very broad range of people who lived in Louisiana through 1820 are recorded in these databases.

Some of these data have been entered into the fields in the form of digits. Because digits are more precise than words, they improve the accuracy and uniformity of the data and allow for complex, statistical calculations. An explanation of what each digit represents for each field is contained in the code sheets for the *Louisiana Slave Database* and the *Louisiana Free Database*, but it is rarely necessary to consult them. Genealogists searching for ancestors using database software alone have very few digits to deal with. The name fields are not digitalized. The genealogist can do a name search, preferably by using the alphabetized index and locating a particular early Louisiana person or family, pinpointing where and when they lived or died, and obtain precise information about where these documents listing their names are housed so they can be easily located and copied. It is sometimes possible to identify the "nations" of the African ancestors of individuals who have ancestors in Louisiana by making links between information contained in the Sacramental Records of the various Archdiocese of the Catholic Church of Louisiana and these databases. The vast majority (74.4%) of ages are recorded in the **Louisiana Slave Database** clearly in numeric form. A much smaller percent (15.3%) give age categories which are digitalized. Skills, illnesses, character as described by the master or appraiser, family relationships, are all described first in plain English and then digitalized. The comments fields have all been translated into English. The various currencies in circulation were converted into common denominator prices. [4] Parish names are abbreviated in English in the Parish field and should be clear to the user without consulting the digitalized Location field. Many of the birthplaces are written out in the Spell fields which record the exact way the birthplace was spelled, but the codes for the birthpl fields will often have to be looked up by researchers who do not use SPSS9.

For researchers making complex calculations on SPSS Version 9, the SPSS.sav files supplied on this disc automatically translate all digits into words. When the researcher needs to know what these digits represent in order to select data for calculations, the researcher simply clicks on the icon for codes and then on the relevant field and the SPSS package identifies value labels for each digit of the field. SPSS syntax files are supplied for both databases. These syntax files can be altered to recode and reorganize the data in any form which the researcher wishes.

These remarkable Louisiana documents pay particular attention to recording the birthplace of the slaves described, including their African "nations." The richness of this information is certainly unique for any documents which describe slaves who became part of the population of the United States. The vast majority of slaves whose birthplaces were identified were Africans. Among 37,748 slaves whose birthplaces were recorded, 24,104 (63.9%) were of African birth. Among these, 9,254 (24.5%) indicate specific "nations" (ethnicities), 8,755 (36.3%) indicate their African coastal origins, and 6,095 (25.3%)simply indicate that they were Africans with no other information about their origins. Information about the maritime slave trade is rich: 9,783 records contain information about the voyage African slaves arrived on, among which 8,041 arrived on Atlantic slave trade voyages and 1,742 on transshipment voyages from the Caribbean and from East Coast ports of the United States out of a total of 2,646 records showing the transshipment voyage on which slaves of various origins arrived. Most of those of identified origins were newly arriving Africans (listed as *brut* in French or *bozal* in Spanish) purchased from Atlantic slave trade ships. There is a particularly high percentage of identified birthplaces, especially many African "nations" of slaves, recorded in documents dating between 1770 and 1820 in the lower Mississippi Valley parishes: St. Charles, St. John the Baptist, Pointe Coupee, and to a lesser extent Orleans. This remarkably full information allows us to make accurate estimates of the proportions of Creoles, Africans of various "nations," Caribbean, English-speaking, and Indian slaves over time. There are 1,068 records involving runaway slaves and 575 records which indicate and record some testimony by slaves. There are 22,263 records (22.4%) which show family relationships among slaves. Character traits are shown for 855, skills for 8,749, and illnesses for 2,393 slaves. Complete inventories for 2,904 estates are recorded with estate numbers which show, in addition to a unique number, the parish, the number of slaves on the estate, and the year. ADD fields specific to the FREE database.

The creation of these databases began in 1984 after the author discovered an impressive number of notarial documents in the courthouse at New Roads, Pointe Coupee Parish which indicated the African ethnicity of the slaves. Results and calculations for Pointe Coupee during the Spanish period went into her book, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana: the Development of Afro-Creole Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992). The database project received substantial funding from the National Endowment for the Humanities in 1991 and was gradually expanded to include all of Louisiana through 1820.

Data entry was carried out in courthouses and archives throughout Louisiana from July 1, 1991 through August 31, 1996. Ulysse S. Ricard, Jr., Chief Archivist of the Amistad Research Center, was given released time to work full time on the project during its first year. Unfortunately, he became quite ill at the outset of the project and he died a few years later. Ricard's enthusiasm for the work, and his skills in the paleography of Louisiana French and Spanish colonial documents was an inspiration to all of us. He is sorely missed. This CD is dedicated to his memory. Phillip McLeod, a student in Tulane University's Latin American Studies Ph. D. program, filled in when Ricard got sick, worked full time on the project during the first year and continued to work at least part time throughout the entire project. His diligence, skill, modesty, dedication, open-mindedness, care, and attention to details in research, data entry and database cleaning made the success of this project possible. Gregory Osborne moved to New Orleans from Los Angeles to work full time on the project during academic year 1991-92. He now works in the

Louisiana Room of the New Orleans Public Library and devotes much of his time and attention to Afro-Louisiana genealogy. Mabel Macias devoted careful time and attention to research and data entry for about a year. Osvaldo Ortega and Peter Caron each worked on the project for a few weeks.

Data was normally entered directly from the original manuscript documents into DbaseV for Dos using laptop computers. The project director entered data alongside the other researchers while training and supervising them until she was confident of their competence and then carefully reviewed their work, correcting detectable errors. She maintained the central databases into which new data was downloaded as it was collected. There are about 1,000,000 recorded fields of often complex information entered into these databases. Regardless of the diligence and care exercised, there are bound to be some mistakes. Names were entered the way they were spelled, and spellings of the same names varied among documents. Standardized spelling of words did not exist in these documents. They were written in three languages: French (60,876 or 61.2%), Spanish (16,861 or 17.0%), and English (21,682 or 21.8%). We identified and translated words for skills and illnesses, some of which are no longer used. In the process of translation, we made every attempt to include the original words in the original languages in all fields as well as in phrases and sentences in the COMMENTS field. There is a LINGUISTICS field which flags records relevant to linguists. Most of the documents were located in Orleans Parish (56,934 or 57.3%), the rest(42,485 or 42.7%) in rural Louisiana. Almost all documents were in French in rural Louisiana throughout the Spanish period. After the United States took over Louisiana, the rural documents became heavily English while the New Orleans documents, which had been almost entirely in Spanish during the Spanish period (1770-1803) reverted largely to French during the American period (1804-1820).

Database design cannot be divorced from the process of research. Early database design does not produce a finished product. It evolves as the historian becomes more familiar with the documents, with the data, and with new questions as they arise. Answers, tentative answers, and partial answers lead to new questions. Additional fields are entered and recoded during and after the data entry process has been completed. Maintaining flexibility to make changes in the database design and to make corrections in data entry is essential. The choice of DbaseV for Dos as the software package for these databases was a good one. The data is entirely portable and can be uploaded into new database and statistical software packages for Windows and hopefully beyond as this technology rapidly advances. Data can be uploaded into any good database software, recoded, reorganized, and uploaded into SPSS or other statistical packages to allow for complex calculations. In the process, the data can be reorganized to suit the user. Computer programmers have been avoided, keeping costs down and flexibility and reliability up. This author's philosophy is that databases are the work of historians, not technicians. Compact disc writers for desktop computers appeared on the market just as manufacturing of the CD was on the agenda. As a result, much time, money, and aggravation was saved and we were able to keep the cost of the CD quite low.

Once the data entry process was largely completed, many details had to be ironed out: always a slow, tedious process on a large database. Checking for duplications of identical documents found in more than one archive and deleting the duplications was a major chore. We did not delete the same slaves duplicated over time because, aside from the difficulties of such an undertaking, it would have

eliminated much data which demonstrated changing patterns and made it impossible to trace particular slaves in time depth. When estates were inventoried and then sold immediately afterwards, we recorded slaves only once, indicating date of inventory and date of sale as well as the date of the document and both the inventory and the sale price. In cases where months and, at times, years elapsed between inventory and sale of estates, we recorded slaves separately in order to be able to calculate changes over time in the same estate.

Pinpointing and identifying some of the African "nations" (ethnicities) found in the documents was more difficult than one might expect. Much information was initially taken from Philip D Curtin's *The Atlantic Slave Trade: a Census*. But an amazing array of varieties of "nations" were found in the documents. Patrick Manning played the major role in identifying ethnicities and their African regions of origin at the early stages of the project. Since 1996, members of the international community of scholars have generously contributed their expertise over H-Africa net and through email. The input of Adam Jones, Owen Kalinga, Martin Klein, Robin Law, Michael Levin, Paul Lovejoy, Joseph C. Miller, Bruce Mouser, Mikael Parkvall, and Stephen Rockel. is gratefully acknowledged. Ibrahima Seck, a historian living in Senegal of mixed Wolof and Fulbe ancestry with a strong feeling for language, indicated many of the African names(Code 4 in nametype field - 10,370 names), names which were possibly African or European (Code 8 in nametype field - 8,742 names), and Islamic names (1,016 names). He also included explanations of some of these names in the **NAMEXPLAIN** field where his input is initialed **IS**.

Errors had to be checked and corrected, including typos found among hundreds of thousands of names. Corrections were made with maximum respect for the data since standardized spelling was not the norm and names spelled differently could have been distinct names. Those searching for names must use their imagination about how names could have been spelled. Both SOUNDSLIKE and name indexes should be used and various spellings tried. Recoding and reorganization of some fields for greater clarity took place in the final stages of database preparation. Mabel R. Williams made a major contribution to these final revisions. Inevitably, there are still some errors on such a huge database, but hopefully, they are minimal.

Paul Lachance created the initial SPSS Syntax File for the Louisiana Slave Database during the summer of 1996. SPSS.syn (syntax) and SPSS.sav (data) files for both databases are included on the CD. The SPSS syntax files allow the user to customize the databases in accordance with the user's opinions and needs. Instructions for converting the SPSS files for use on the Apple version of SPSS is contained in the file folder APPLE. The SPSS syntax files provided on this disk contain value labels for each field which translate digits into words. JNLSLAVE.syn recodes birthplaces of Africans by coastal region under the field AFREGION. The recoded field AFETH disaggregates Africans assigned to various coastal regions based upon "nation" descriptions in the documents from those identified by coastal regions only. Slaves described as "Guinea" or from the "Coast of Guinea" were placed under the Sierra Leone coastal region based upon the author's study of the context in which these terms were used. [5] They can be easily moved to the Africans of unknown origin category if the researcher so wishes.

In short, the Louisiana Slave and the Louisiana Free Database are unique tools for studying the slave as well as the free population of Louisiana through 1820. They contain a vast amount of rich and unusual,

hitherto unexplored and unrecorded data and organizes them to ask and to quickly and easily answer many complex, previously asked and unasked questions. They should be helpful to scholars making comparisons of patterns of slavery in other places in the Americas. They should clarify patterns of the slave trade in Africa as well, pinpointing which ethnicities had certainly entered the Atlantic slave trade by a certain time, their gender, changing proportions among ethnicities taken from various African coasts over time, and to some extent their age patterns. They will certainly be very useful to anyone searching for a Louisiana ancestor.

It is our hope that these databases will help both scholars and genealogists in their work. Best of luck to all of you.

FOOTNOTES:

[1] These databases are one of the results of a project funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Cultural Affairs Office of France, the Program for Cultural Cooperation between the Spanish Ministry of Culture and United States Universities, the John Simon Guggenheim Foundation, the Louisiana Endowment for the Humanities, the Historic New Orleans Collection, the University of New Orleans, with in-kind support from Northeastern University and from Rutgers University. Gwendolyn Midlo Hall was project director. Patrick Manning was co-investigator. Manning's contribution to the expansion of the database definitions and the creation of coding sheets which took place when the NEH-funded project began in 1991 is hard to overestimate. He played the major role in avoiding mistakes which would have haunted us ever after. Thereafter Manning devoted most of his research time funded under this project to developing his Louisiana Sacramental Records Spreadsheets which are scheduled to appear in a subsequent edition of this CD.

[2] All sources are fully cited in the DEPOT field in the codesheets.

[3] The Doctype field records the type of document in which the individual slave was recorded.

[4] Documents recording the same prices in different currencies over time were collected by this writer.Robert A. Rosenberg, Director of the Edison Papers Project housed at Rutgers University, helped me develop the price calculation formulas in 1988 using comparable price data collected from the Pointe Coupee Post during the Spanish period. This formula has held up remarkably well based upon comparable price data collected for the entire range of times and places and the original formulat was used for both databases. But some changes were made record by record all of which are indicated in the comments field. Subtleties still need to be ironed out, but the price data is largely reliable.

[5] Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, The African Diaspora in the Americas: Regions, Ethnicities, and Cultures (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, forthcoming 2000).