Recovering, Indexing and Digitizing Missing Northeast Slavery Records

1. Project Narrative

Project Overview

This ACLS Digital Justice Development Grant will support the Northeast Slavery Records Index (NESRI) with small projects to locate, organize and present additional digital records documenting enslavement in eight northeastern states from New Jersey to Maine. Begun in 2017 and permanently located at https://nesri.commons.gc.cuny.edu/, NESRI is an ongoing digital public history initiative that currently indexes over 64,000 original records of slavery from the 1500s through the 1860s. These are, presented in customizable reports that are free and accessible online to scholars, students and the general public. The small projects are expected to add at least 6,000 new records to the NESRI database.

NESRI is co-directed by Public Administration Professors Judy-Lynne Peters and Fred Benton at John Jay College of Criminal Justice (JJCJ), who specialize in the public history of enslavement as documented in original records. Public Administration is an interdisciplinary field that is grounded in political science, economics, management, sociology, and history, and is informed by qualitative and quantitative social science methods and data analytics. NESRI applies advanced internet technologies to document and interpret the history of enslavement.

NESRI customized reports contain six sections with twelve tables of records. These include: a general introduction to the types of enslavement records; a presentation of census records with the totals of free and enslaved people at various times; lists of individual enslavers and enslaved individuals with links to related records, where available; lists of enslaved individuals enlisted on either army the Revolutionary War; and a presentation of additional information such as homes or buildings linked to enslavement and records of resistance or the underground railroad. In addition, at the end of each report there is a topical search function permitting further research and analysis of the slavery records.

Already, these reports are very useful to communities studying their histories of enslavement as they provide instantly downloadable documentation including the source of each record and where it is maintained. Many of these sources might otherwise take months or years to uncover.

However, we know there are many more sources and records that we have yet to include in the database, mostly because we lack the resources to pursue them. We continue to add records with our students and Northeast state partners, but, at his point, we have indexed most of the easily available records from public archives and colonial, federal and state sources.

To achieve our eventual goal of indexing all existing records, we now must dig into sources that are not yet digitized or are not directly identified as being about enslavement. This requires more time and personnel, in addition to greater interpretative expertise, training and supervision. The grant would enable NESRI to tackle new or difficult research and to find more of the missing records.

Our database helps us identify potentially profitable sources of new information. For example, if one of our town reports shows many census records of enslavement but none for birth records required by gradual emancipation laws, we know to go looking for lists of babies born to enslaved women.

This was the case for the City of New Rochelle, New York. When we asked the City Clerk for the birth records, she said they were sent to the New Rochelle Library. The library said they had gone to the Thomas Paine Society, who said they were sent to the Westchester County Historical Society, who said they were sent to the County Archive. Ultimately, we found them deep in the archive and added copies to our database, where they contribute to a robust slavery report for New Rochelle.

If awarded this grant, we would be able to support current and new partners across our states to do the type of work we accomplished in New Rochelle. They would help us locate and index additional digital records and digitize additional analog records of enslavement. These could include, for example, early

church records in Connecticut, more of the birth and manumission records maintained by county and town clerks in New Jersey, New York, Connecticut and Rhode Island.

NESRI receives ongoing infrastructure support from John Jay College and CUNY; the college also covers the costs for Professor Benton's time. A $99,972 grant would cover the following additional costs:

- Professor Peters' time, equivalent to teaching one course for two semesters, for a total of $35,972, so that she can continue to co-direct NESRI and manage the projects funded through the grant. She would also lead a management committee to recruit, select and award the small project contracts.
- The remaining $64,000 would pay for at least fourteen contracts with NESRI partners to index and add datasets to the NESRI database. The contracts would be structured around work products, not hourly compensation, and, by CUNY regulations, each would not exceed $5000.

The project management committee would consist of Professor Peters and one representative from each NESRI state with an active partner. This committee would consider three factors:

- Records: They would preference projects to locate records that include names and locations of enslaved people and that involve events of enslavement.
- Places: They would preference projects that focus on places where records are missing and where enslavement has not been well-documented. They would also want to support places where NESRI could partner with community-based projects already seeking to document histories of enslavement.
- Partners: While they would want to support NESRI's current partners and organizations, they would also want to reach out to additional scholars and public historians with diverse backgrounds.

Professor Benton would provide technical support and quality assurance oversight. He would also coordinate a search for missing records across the NESRI states. The following are examples of potential projects:

- The New York State Archive has offered to partner with NESRI to contact clerks in all 57 counties, 932 towns and 62 cities to locate records of emancipation and of children born to enslaved mothers. NESRI already contains many of these records, but many more have yet to be found.

- Similar efforts could be made in the other NESRI states, particularly New Jersey, Connecticut and Rhode Island, where collections are likely to be found.

- Connecticut partners could research early church records to identify enslaved people. There are 134 volumes of such records, and Public History students at Central Connecticut State University are already involved in a pilot project indexing some of these records.

The proposed project(s) satisfy the ACLS Digital Development Grant evaluation criteria.

- The project engages with understudied, underfunded, or otherwise marginalized topics of scholarly inquiry. Until recently slavery in the Northeast states was forgotten or ignored. Many of the records that are foundational to academic and community-based study are lost, misplaced or misunderstood. The grant would allow NESRI to uncover and present additional information on enslavement in the Northeast.

- The project advances justice and equity by addressing subjects and materials of significance for society and scholarship. NESRI provides scholars and community-based public historians with a documentary history of slavery. It restores names and identities to many enslaved people and holds their enslavers to account. The grant would allow NESRI to inform additional communities about their histories of enslavement, based on new, documentary evidence.

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- The project has strong intellectual, technological, and financial planning. The need to recover, index and digitize historical public records is widely understood and accepted. But NESRI has moved beyond the conceptual stages. It is operational now; the database management and online reporting systems work now. The critical need is to continue to recover, index, and digitize more records.

- The project has a plan for the future. NESRI operates now and is being embedded into instruction at John Jay College.   We are creating a governance structure to assure future generations of faculty engagement and support. In addition, we are developing an endowment plan. All information gathered through the grant will continue to be a part of NESRI.

- The project contributes to the careers of scholars and public historians. This project is designed to support our partners in the Northeast states, and to recruit and train new scholars and independent historians to take on the important work of locating, preserving and indexing slavery records.

- The project has a clear mission and set of target audiences. The project would serve scholars of slavery by providing access to additional records that they would have great difficulty locating. It would serve additional communities via NESRI's free online reports on their records of slavery, advancing community understanding of their early history and its legacies. The project would serve students by providing additional documentary evidence of enslavement as a foundation for their studies of American history, and their studies of historical methods. The grant would expand the numbers of scholars, students and communities NESRI serves.

Project History and Impact

The proposed project derives directly from NESRI and the need to expand the database. The seed for NESRI was planted in Mamaroneck, N.Y., where Professor Benton researched and wrote about slavery for the local newspaper, including an article commemorating each enslaved person in the area with annual updates as new names surfaced. In 2017, Professor Peters suggested a similar project involving graduate student researchers and focusing on New York City and New York State; this became the New York Slavery Records Index, launched in 2018. In 2020, faculty from Monmouth University, along with an

independent historian, joined the project to expand the database to New Jersey. By 2021, with partners

from other nearby states, the project morphed into the <u>Northeast</u> Slavery Records Index.

NESRI's research and presentations provide a unique contribution to the study of enslavement. While

there are other indices in the United State, none is as comprehensive, both in the numbers of records and

in the types of reports. There are three similar projects:

- Slave Voyages at https://www.slavevoyages.org/ is a database of transatlantic shipping of enslaved
  people. It does not include records about enslavement practices in the destination nations. NESRI has
  disaggregated the Slave Voyages dataset and created presentations of slave ships and voyages for
  Northeast state localities. Thus, we can separately describe a ship built in Maine, then registered in
  Boston, then landing enslaved people in New York City, with each record linked back to the source
  records in Slave Voyages.
- The Louisiana Slave Trade database (https://www.whitneyplantation.org/the-louisiana-slave-
  database/) focuses solely on transaction documents for purchases of enslaved people in Louisiana.
  NESRI researchers discovered and indexed the slave trade records 32 people who were traded and
  enslaved in Louisiana but born in New York.
- The Michigan State University database (http://enslaved.org) aggregates information from other
  collections of indices, most of which are international. Very few records are from the Northeast. For
  example, as of February 2022 it included 554 results relating to New York, while the NESRI had over
  6,632 records related to enslaved people in New York and over 40,397 records relating to enslavers in
  NY.

Unlike other indices, NESRI includes articles, online on our website, that interpret the records. These

include:

- The <u>Art of Enslavement,</u> which presents paintings and other works of art depicting enslaved people and their enslavers.

- The <u>Public Administration of Slavery</u>, which describes and documents public officials acting to advance or oppose enslavement and which presents locality reports for the counties of each Master of Public Administration program in the Northeast.

- The <u>Names Index for Enslaved Persons</u>, which alphabetically sorts 16,309 records across the Northeast naming enslaved people. For example, the first name "Benjamin" appears in 24 enslavement records each linked to the source of each record.

The approach and the technical design of NESRI are described by the co-directors in "Information Wanted: Syncing the Silos of Slavery Records."[1]

Google Analytics identifies 2,100 new NESRI users in the past 12 months.

Project Infrastructure

The infrastructure for the grant project will be the same as that used for NESRI: all new data retrieved by the partners will be submitted to the database. NESRI provides digital access or links to many forms of records, including census lists, slave trade transactions, cemetery records, birth certifications, manumissions, ship inventories, newspaper accounts, private narratives, legal documents and many other sources. NESRI's primary objectives are to assemble the database, and then to use digital and website technologies to interpret the information for use by scholars, students and the public.

The NESRI website is hosted at the CUNY Digital Commons, a WordPress multisite platform maintained for all CUNY faculty and campuses by the CUNY Graduate Center, where Professor Benton is also a faculty member in the Criminal Justice Ph.D. Program. However, while WordPress can support small datasets, the scale of the NESRI database and the volume of accesses requires a more robust database

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[1] This is a chapter in Williams, Hawthorne, and Rehberger, editors. Encoding Enslaved.org: Slavery, Databases, and Digital Histories. Michigan State University Press, forthcoming 2022.

technology. Therefore, NESRI contracts for a service from Caspio, a powerful and advanced database management service, for large scale data analytics and rapid production of tables and graphics that are then embedded in our WordPress online documents. NESRI's community reports and articles involve complex interplay between a WordPress webpage that has code embedded in it to access and display tables and graphics generated by Caspio from the NESRI database maintained on a Caspio server.

The outlook for the continuity of NESRI is favorable. It requires no additional funds for website hosting, given its support by CUNY through the Digital Commons. Researching and indexing records is time-consuming and increasingly difficult as we seek harder-to-locate information. However, once in our database, a record becomes a permanent part of the collection.

Our Caspio service fee is paid through 2024, funded through a grant. Access to such an advanced database service is a continuing cost but we expect this cost to continue to decline due to innovation and competition.

To ensure stable leadership and funding for NESRI into the future, we are working with John Jay College and the John Jay College Foundation to form a permanent faculty-led governance structure along with an endowment to cover database costs and support a fund-raising program.

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<center>**3. Project Timeline**</center>

The Northeast Slavery Records Index (NESRI) exists and the project fits into our ongoing efforts. Thus, even though the course reassignments for Professors Peters and Benton take place during the Fall 2022 and Spring 2023 semesters, their work takes place every month of the project.

- July 2022: The Project Management Committee is appointed and organized, and the list of potential new database projects is updated. A Request for Proposals RFP is drafted with two response dates – early September and early January. Proposals may not exceed $5,000 in fees for any person or project. The RFP will state that awardees are expected to complete coding of datasets within three months of contracting. The RFP requires a scope of work statement that describes the records to be coded, the experience and qualifications of the applicant, and the work plan for the coding.

- August 2022: The RFP is widely circulated, including to the Universities Studying Slavery list as well as to organizations and individuals know to NESRI state partners. Several information sessions are held for people interested in applying.

- September 2022: The first round of proposals is received, and the Project Management Committee reviews them and makes decisions committing 40% to 60% of the $64,000 in project funds.

- September 2022: Professor Benton conducts a training session for the awardees and provides coding and dataset documentation. An ongoing process for technical assistance and project monitoring is launched. Contracts are issued and work begins.

- October 2022: The RFP is sent out again reinforcing the second deadline in early January 2023. Professor Benton receives and reviews initial database drafts for each awardee, to

assure that the coding meets NESRI's documentation requirements and to assist with any interpretative issues.

- December 2022: The datasets are completed for the first round of projects. The Project Management Committee, with Professors Peters and Benton, reviews final submissions and makes recommendations for corrections or enhancements.

- January 2022: The second round of proposals is received, and the Project Management Committee reviews them and makes decisions committing the remainder of the $64,000 in project funds.

- February 2022: Professor Benton conducts a training session for the new awardees and provides coding and dataset documentation. An ongoing process for technical assistance and project monitoring continues. Contracts are issued and work begins.

- March 2022: Professor Benton receives initial database drafts for each second round awardee.

- April 2022: The first round of datasets is complete and Professor Benton has uploaded them to the NESRI database. The awardees and the Project Management Committee tests the datasets by running locality reports and other searches.

- May 2022: The datasets are complete for the second round of projects. The Project Management Committee, with Professors Peters and Benton, reviews the submissions and makes recommendations for corrections or enhancements.

- June 2022: The second-round datasets are uploaded to the NESRI database. The awardees and the Project Management Committee test the datasets by running locality reports and other searches. A final report of the project is submitted to ACLS.

4. Budget and Budget Description

This project extends over 12 months from July 1, 2022 to June 30, 2023. The project supports Professors Peters and Benton with 2 course releases, 1 each for Fall 2022 and Spring 2023. However, as is the case with course instruction their work extends before and after the academic semester. As co-directors of NESRI they are committed to the ongoing success of the project every day.

Professor Peter's reassignment is borne by this project. Professor Benton's reassignment is funded by CUNY and John Jay College. Dr. Benton is a professor and Dr. Peters is a lecturer. Their teaching loads are slightly different and therefore their percent effort is as well (30% for Dr. Benton, 25% for Dr. Peters will afford them each 2 course releases).

The majority of the project resources are to be expended to compensate scholars for the indexing of records of enslavement. These small projects are awarded based on an open process that reflects the importance of the records and the experience and skill of the expert and are administered in compliance with Research Foundation of CUNY rules for contracting with independent consultants.

			ACLS Digital Justice Development Grant			
			Recovering, Indexing and Digitizing Northeast Slavery Records			
Category	**Description**	**Time Period**	**Rate**	**ACLS Cost**	**JJCCJ Cost**	**Total Cost**
Personnel Salary, Wages, Benefits						
	Professor Fred Warren Benton	9 months	30% academic year effort of 193,061.71		41,723	41,723
	Fringe benefit on above at .517				21,571	21,571
	Professor Judy-Lynne Peters	9 months	25% academic year effort of 94,851.19	23,713		
	Fringe benefit on above at .517			12,260		
Total: Personnel Salary, Wages, Benefits				35,972	63,294	99,266
Contractual						
	Consultant Services (Data Acquisition Projects)	13-15 projects @ 4 months each	1280 total hours at $50 average	64,000		
Total: Contractual				64,000	-	64,000
Total Budget Request				99,972	63,294	163,266

5. Intellectual Property Statement

As a project administered through the Research Foundation (RF-CUNY) of the City University of New York (CUNY). RF_CUNY is tax-exempt under section 501(c)(3)). This project must comply with the CUNY Intellectual Property Policy.[2] The following are specific responses to the topics raised:

(a) No software will be developed in this project. The software already exists and is fully deployed. The purpose of the project is to uncover slavery records and create index records to be added to the dataset of the Northeast Slavery Records Index (NESRI).

(b) Records in the NESRI dataset produced through research reports can be instantly downloaded by users. This is a feature of all NESRI search reports, constituting wide dissemination.

(c) Since there is no software developed in this project, there are no third-party software rights to be protected based on this project. With respect to the datasets produced in this project, the datasets would be downloadable by all users so no intellectual property right to the original historical records is asserted. However, every NESRI record produced will identify and attribute authorship to the original creator of the NESRI indexing record. But the NESRI records typically refer to very old public documents that are in the public domain.

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[2] The policy is accessible here: https://www.cuny.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/page-assets/research/research-compliance/sponsored/guidance/pre-award/ip/intellectual_property_9.20.11-1.pdf

6. Project Staffing

The proposed project would be an initiative of the Northeast Slavery Records Index (NESRI), which is co-directed by Doctoral Lecturer Judy-Lynne Peters and Professor Fred Warren "Ned" Benton, both members of the Public Administration faculty of John Jay College of Criminal Justice. Professor Peters is the Principal Investigator for the proposed project.

Professor Peters is the JJCCJ co-representative in the Universities Studying Slavery, a multi-institutional collaborative effort working to address historical and contemporary issues dealing with race and inequality in higher education and university communities, and the complicated legacies of slavery in modern American society.

She is Vice-chair of the College's Undergraduate Curriculum and Standards Committee. She is also a member of the John Jay College Committee Studying Slavery, Abolition, and Resistance, an ad hoc committee of John Jay faculty, students, and administrators whose purpose is to make the most, educationally and civically, of the John Jay-housed Northeast Slavery Records Index as well as to facilitate the college's participation in the Universities Studying Slavery consortium. She is also a college representative to the Universities Studying Slavery project at the University of Virginia.

Professor Benton is also the President of the college's Faculty Senate and a member of the faculty of the Ph.D. Program in Criminal Justice of the CUNY Graduate Center, where he has mentored and chaired the dissertation committees of 20 successful doctoral students, six of whom wrote historical dissertations.

The following table summarizes the roles of Professors Peters and Benton in the project.

Professor Benton	Professor Peters
Principal Project Participant	Grant Principal Investigator and Principal Project Participant
	Chair of the Project Management Committee
Development of the List of Priority Projects, in consultation with the state partners.	
	Development of the Request for Proposals
Preparation of the Training Materials	Circulation of the Request for Proposals
Training of the consultants	Selection of the projects and consultants
Second week review of the work products	
Ongoing technical assistance to the consultants	
Final review of the work products	
Posting of the datasets to NESRI	Testing of the datasets with the consultants and NESRI partners
Production of the final report of the grant.	

Integral to the development and operation of NESRI, and the conduct of this project, are our state partners. Some states have a designated lead partner, and other states have a working group of academic scholars and independent historians. Examples of our partners include:

- Dennis Culliton, M.A.T., C.A.G.S., is the Founder and Executive Director of the Witness Stones Project.

- Meadow Dibble is a writer, editor, and social entrepreneur. In 2018, she launched Atlantic Black Box, a public history project that empowers communities throughout New England to take up the critical work of researching and reckoning with our region's complicity in the slave trade and the global economy of enslavement.

- Vana Carmona is currently the Maine Community Research Director for Atlantic Black Box.

- Rick Geffken revealed many largely unheard stories from New Jersey's dark history of slavery in his book, "Stories of Slavery in New Jersey." He is a trustee of the Shrewsbury Historical

Society, past president and a trustee of the Jersey Coast Heritage Museum at Sandlass House, former publisher of the Monmouth Connection and a member of the Navesink Maritime Historical Association and the Monmouth County Historical Association.