Found Missing: Fugitive Slaves, Jailer ads, and Surveillance in Antebellum New Orleans

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Found Missing:
Fugitive Slaves, Jailer Ads, and Surveillance in Antebellum New Orleans

A Thesis

Submitted to the Department of History
University of New Orleans
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

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in
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Public History

By
Tara Garbutt
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Abstract

This paper explores Antebellum newspaper advertisements placed by jailers reporting the capture of alleged fugitive slaves. It argues that jailer ads should be treated as parallel yet distinct sources from runways ads placed by slaveholders in Antebellum newspapers. Whereas owner ads contain detailed information about a given individual—including skills, personality traits, linguistic abilities, family relations, former owners and history of sale—jailer ads relied on hearsay evidence and the direct testimony of those they captured. The jailer ads therefore likely reflect a combination of sharing, misleading, and withholding information on the part of the alleged fugitive. While owner-placed ads have been mined by many historians, jailer ads have been given less attention as evidence of resistance and surveillance in the Antebellum South. The jailer ads used here appeared in 1828 in the New Orleans Argus, one of the main repositories for both jailer- and owner-placed runaway slave advertisements in New Orleans at the time. The Argus played a critical role in policing and surveillance of the city’s enslaved population just as New Orleans was becoming the largest slave market in the South. The large volume of these advertisements, however, also testifies to enslaved people’s frequent rejection of bondage.

Keywords: Slavery, Jailer Advertisements, Enslaved, New Orleans Slave Market, Jailers, 1828 New Orleans
Introduction

Her name is unknown, but her aim was to escape. She ran away from her enslaver and was caught by a jailer in Jefferson Parish, Louisiana, just outside of New Orleans. Then she ran again. She escaped with two men, one a debtor and the other a slave, from the parish jail. We know this because the names of the men appeared in an advertisement placed by the jailer. It described Josiah White as a debtor, with pale complexion, and Absalom as a “negro male.” The unnamed young woman was around eighteen to twenty years of age. The jailer’s description of her was that she was short and very stout. She had an iron ring fastened to one of her legs and her proprietor was unknown. The advertisement, placed by the jailer in the *New Orleans Argus*, ran for one year, from January 16, 1827 to February 1, 1828.

This advertisement was the first and last of the advertisements consulted for the present study. Its long run in the paper demonstrates the resistance of the unnamed young woman and leaves open the possibility that she found freedom. In between the first and the last time that the advertisement appeared, jailers in the city of New Orleans and in surrounding parishes placed over two hundred advertisements in the *Argus*, many of which ran multiple times. What happened to the enslaved people listed in those advertisements is very difficult to discern, but their flight and at times repeated attempts to escape illustrate the unwillingness of enslaved people to remain in bondage. At the same time, consistent efforts by jailers to capture suspected fugitives reveal the development of an increasingly intricate system of surveillance designed to keep enslaved people under the control of their owners in a rapidly expanding plantation society.
This paper explores Antebellum newspaper advertisements placed by jailers reporting the capture of alleged fugitive slaves. It argues that jailer ads should be treated as parallel yet distinct sources from runways ads placed by slaveholders in Antebellum newspapers. Whereas owner ads contain detailed information about a given individual—including skills, personality traits, linguistic abilities, family relations, former owners and history of sale—jailer ads relied on hearsay evidence and the direct testimony of those they captured. The ads likely reflect a combination of sharing, misleading, and withholding information on the part of the alleged fugitive. Some may have claimed to be free, for instance, in an effort to elude their owner, while others may have been free people unjustly detained. Still others may have lied about the name of their enslaver. Yet unlike the owner ads, jailer ads contain something of the voices of alleged fugitives. While owner-placed ads have been mined by many historians, jailer ads have been given less attention as evidence of resistance and surveillance in the Antebellum South.

New Orleans in 1828

During the annual meeting of the Organization of American Historians in April 2017 in New Orleans, a walking tour titled “Sites of the Trade: Antebellum New Orleans as Slavery’s Hub” introduced historians from around the country to the workings of the slave market in the city before the Civil War. The tour focused on the city’s French Quarter, a large part of the market, but not the only part. The tour zigzagged through the streets of the Quarter, starting at end of Canal Street by the Mississippi River and meandered to Esplanade Avenue. Although many on the tour might have known something about private slave trading and purchasing, few knew of the state of Louisiana’s role in the trade. When the tour reached the Cabildo, next to the Cathedral on Jackson Square, the guide explained that the Cabildo was a site the state acquired, sold, and housed the enslaved. The Cabildo was also the site of the city jail. Erin Greenwald,
then Curator at the Historic New Orleans Collection and one of the tour’s guides, explained that the enslaved jailed there would be chained up and paraded around the city to work on various public work projects. The jailers would also hire out enslaved prisoners to private individuals.

Urban slavery in New Orleans in 1828 was a system that allowed for considerable mobility within the city environs for enslaved workers provided they had the consent of their owners. Some of the enslaved were hired out for jobs across the city, work for which they may or may not have been compensated. If enslaved persons were found away from their owners, they would need paperwork stating what they were doing and to whom they belonged. Some carried evidence of their enslavement on their bodies, like missing limbs and scars (signifiers often mentioned in the jailer advertisements). This level of surveillance and control over the enslaved also shaped the daily lives of free people of color, who needed to have paperwork proving their free status or they could risk being seized as a runaway and jailed. So despite relative mobility, jailers maintained close surveillance on all people of color, free and enslaved.¹

¹ Rashauna Johnson Slavery’s Metropolis: Unfree Labor in New Orleans during the Age of Revolutions (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016); Judith Kelleher Schafer, Slavery, the Civil Law, and the Supreme Court of Louisiana. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1994.)
Fig. 1 Plan of the city and suburbs of New Orleans: from a survey made in 1815, I. Tanesse and William Rollinson, Creators. New Orleans: P. Maspero, 1817. Library of Congress Geography and Map Division.

Fig 2. Charles Zimpel, *Topographical Map of New Orleans and its Vicinity embracing a distance of twelve miles up, and eight and three quarter miles down the Mississippi River, and Part of Lake Pontchartrain representing all Public Improvements existing and projected and important Establishments, accompanied by a Statistical table, containing the most accurate Illustrations; prefaced by a Splendid View of New Orleans, & Compiled from actual surveys and the best authorities*. 1834. Wiki Commons accessed 10/29/17. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Map-of-New-Orleans_1834_Zimpel.jpg
The growth in the city’s population between 1810 and 1820 indicates the rapidly urbanizing demography of New Orleans. In those ten years, the white population increased by 7,253, while the enslaved population and the population of free people of color each increased by roughly 1,300. By 1830, New Orleans was the fifth largest city in the United States.\(^2\) A comparison of two maps of the city, from 1815 and 1833, respectively, demonstrates this growth in visual terms, as the city expanded in settlement above and below the French Quarter in just fifteen years. [Figs. 1 and 2]\(^3\)

The recent research on nineteenth-century New Orleans has produced new demographic and geographic views of the city’s development. In his *Bienville’s Dilemma*, Richard Campanella considers the landscape and the cityscape, the people, and their relationship to the various waterways around it, most especially the economic and social significance of the Mississippi River. Campanella highlights the nineteenth-century city’s multiculturalism as central to its growth and its cultural development, quoting William Darby’s observations written in 1816: “No city perhaps on the globe, in an equal number of human beings, presents a greater contrast of national manners, language, and complexion, than does New Orleans.” C. D. Arfwedson recounted having witnessed “Americans, English, French, Scotch, Spaniards, Swedes, Germans, Irish, Italians, Russians, Creoles, Indians, Negroes, Mexicans, and Brazilians” all in New Orleans in 1834.\(^4\)

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\(^4\) Richard Campanella, *Bienville’s Dilemma: A Historical Geography of New Orleans* (Lafayette, LA: Center for Louisiana Studies University of Louisiana at Lafayette, 2008), 167-168
As the population grew, so did New Orleans’s role as a hub for the domestic slave trade. Between 1820 and 1860, two million enslaved people were sold from the Upper South to the Lower South with New Orleans as a central market for buyers in Louisiana, Mississippi and points westward.\(^5\) The presence of slavery and enslaved people, not to mention the growing number of slave dealers in the city, was also the subject of comment by visitors to the city. With *Lincoln in New Orleans*, Campanella also reconstructed the observations of one of the nineteenth century’s most notable visitors to the city, particularly Lincoln’s firsthand experience with an economically booming urban slave society under American governance. That trip produced many firsts for Lincoln: he earned his first dollar, he was introduced to riverboat theatre, he visited a big city, he gained inspiration to become an attorney, and he saw slavery and slaves firsthand. His visit to a large city was complicated by assumptions of what he would see and the reality that he faced. Campanella refers to an incident in Lincoln’s autobiography when he and his flatboat partner were attacked by seven “negros” while they were docked outside the city. They were able to fight them off and get away, although Lincoln received a scar in the encounter. Some of the sources quoted by Campanella said that the men could have been fugitive slaves.

In contrast to New Orleans under French and then Spanish control, when master-slave relations were governed by the *Code Noir* and enslaved people had some small means of appeal regarding their treatment, the city under American control brought a very different system of

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surveillance and government control. Kimberly Hanger has written about the differences among the different government systems. Hanger wrote that the American government changed the laws governing the enslaved out of fears of slave uprisings, and to make it more difficult for the enslaved to be freed and for free people of color to be seen as true citizens. In *Slavery’s Metropolis*, Rashauna Johnson describes what she calls the “Penal Space” of the city in the 1810’s-20’s, especially the laws created that jailers were required to heed. For instance, it was mandatory for jailers to place advertisements in the newspaper when an incarcerated “negro” was considered to be a runaway. At this moment is where the conversation began between the jailer and the enslaved. Johnson wrote about a deposition in 1812 that gives some insight to the role of the jailer in the New Orleans slave system. “Every day, Puche and his subordinates inspected, classified, warehoused, and exploited runaway slaves, criminals, debtors, and others accused of stepping out of place.” This kind of deposition was presumably behind most jailer advertisements, and hence where as evidence the voice of the alleged fugitive can be heard.

The *New Orleans Argus*

Located at the top of the newspaper *The New Orleans Argus* May 15, 1828

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7 Rashauna Johnson, *Slavery’s Metropolis*, 125.
The New Orleans Argus was a local and state newspaper that ran from 1827-1834. It was printed in English and French. The English text occupied the first few pages followed by French text. At the time, the Argus was in competition with a number of local and national newspapers. The paper’s content reflected the views of its owner and publisher, John Gibson. According to historian Joseph Tregle, Gibson was the editor and publisher of two newspapers, The New Orleans Argus and The True American. He used the newspapers to express his radical nativist views on local and national politics. The year chosen for this research, the presidential election year 1828, was a significant one for politics in New Orleans and throughout the country. The contentious political environment surrounding the presidential election was reflected in the city’s local papers. In 1828, the city’s five main newspapers—the Bee, Argus, Louisiana Courier, Louisiana Advertiser, Mercantile Advertiser—still ran in both English and French, and sometimes Spanish. According to Richard Campanella,

Great reading, they were not: the vast majority of every edition comprised commercial advertisements carried over from the previous day. Market reports, shipping news, lottery announcements, runaway slave notices, plagiarized articles, bad poetry, sentimental yarns, patronizing moral lessons, freaky anecdotes, and vitriolic political editorials—unchecked by the vaguest notions of journalistic objectivity—filled the rest of a typical four-page, half-French-half-English edition of a circa-1828 New Orleans.

In essence, these newspapers were repositories for political screeds and commercial notices.

It was in this context that we consider the fugitive slave ads. They were part of the daily

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8 “...found its true Titan in John Gibson of the Argus, who could match the insults and invectives of Wagner blow for blow [Peter Wagner, editor of a competing newspaper, the Louisiana Advertiser, and a rival of Gibson]. They made a ludicrous pair, Gibson a wisp of a man only slightly over five feet in height and weighing but 118 pounds, a dwarf besides the leviathan bulk of his antagonist.” Joseph Tregle Jr., Louisiana in the Age of Jackson: Clash of Culture and Personalities (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1999), p 187.
“working” of the city, appearing casually alongside shipping notices, horse sales, and health tonics.

In a typical issue of the Argus, both jailer and runaway advertisements can be found scattered throughout the paper. In other newspapers, such advertisements had their own section. In the eight months of 1828 studied for this project, a combined total of eight hundred and nine advertisements appeared in English and French, combined. This total includes every appearance of an ad. The same ad often appeared on a given day in both English and French. The ads could be repeated over days or months. A good deal of the profit to the Argus from the jailer advertisements would come from continuous reprinting of those initial advertisements. There were fifty-four initial advertisements and one hundred forty-nine reprints. So, the Argus made a total of one hundred twenty-eight dollars and fifty cents in those months.

Fugitive slave advertisements appeared with increasing frequency in New Orleans newspapers as the nineteenth century progressed. They took two main forms: advertisements placed by slave owners seeking the return of the human property they claimed by law, and advertisements placed by local jailers to alert the city that they had apprehended alleged fugitives and would be detaining them in jail until their owners retrieved them. Although they are often lumped together as one type of primary source, they were in fact fundamentally different in terms of the information they contained. Whereas owner advertisements contained often very detailed descriptions of the runaway, so that a stranger could identify the person described, the jailer advertisements were less descriptive and also more speculative about the history of the person apprehended. Unlike owner advertisements, jailer advertisements were dependent upon the cooperation, forced or not, of the alleged fugitive.
From a survey of one year of the Argus, 1828, it seems that a substantial number of jailer advertisements were placed in the New Orleans paper by jailers in parishes upriver from New Orleans. This indicates that the surveillance system extended beyond the immediate metropolitan area and the expectation that owners of alleged fugitives caught by jailers in upriver parishes in the region surrounding the city of New Orleans would be reading the city paper. The Argus was chosen for this study as the source for the sample of ads because in the year 1828 it carried the largest numbers of these advertisements. (The Daily Picayune, which would become the largest repository in New Orleans for these sources, did not begin publication until 1837.)
Unlike many newspapers of the day, the Argus did not use the familiar “running man” and “running woman” icons for its fugitive ads, icons used by a majority of Antebellum southern newspapers on ads placed by slaveholders. Common to jailer ads in all of these papers, including the Argus, however, was simply the use of a headline: “WAS DETAINED” or “RUNAWAY DETAINED” or “DETAINED IN JAIL.”

Jailers were employed by local governments to detain criminals and enslaved people who had run away or to imprison them at the bequest of an owner as punishment. Hence, state and local government financed and served as an integral part of the enforcement system for surveilling and detaining enslaved people. Government money was spent on housing, feeding, and advertising in the newspapers so the owners could claim their property. Per the standard ad disclaimer, once an owner retrieved an alleged fugitive, said owner was required to reimburse the jailer. If no owner came forward, the alleged fugitive could be sold by the city.10

**Historiography**

Many historians have grappled with how best to use fugitive slave ads as evidence. Some have emphasized the biased nature of the ads, with one source stating: "… in considering the disadvantages of this source, the historian must bear in mind that the advertisements' descriptions of the runaways came from the masters rather than the fugitives themselves."11 Though it is true that owner-placed ads do not contain the voices of the enslaved, they do nonetheless contain extraordinary detail about the runaway since it was in the owner’s interest to provide as much as possible.

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information as possible. In her investigation of the first names of the runaway slaves in Virginia, Iman Laversuch points out that fugitive advertisements were expressions of the owners’ power. Even though the people they sought had eluded them, "slave masters literally inscribed their omnipotence upon the bodies of the people they once held captive."12 For example, one advertisement describes a female slave who had multiple scars over her body, and stated that she had been branded on both cheeks. Another ad describes a male who had had his ear cut off.

The most comprehensive book, to date, on fugitive slaves in North America is Loren Schweininger and John Hope Franklin’s, Runaway Slaves: Rebels on the Plantation (1999). While much of the book concerns plantation areas rather than urban areas, the strategies used by fugitives were common to both types of spaces. According to the authors, the attempts by fugitive slaves “‘representing’ themselves as free, ‘pretending’ to be free, using forged freedom papers, and ‘attempting to pass’ as free, were numerous.”13 The enslaved and the free population in the city of New Orleans were separated by a sheet of paper. Runaway Slaves covered what was likely to have happened to the enslaved and the cost to the owner. The authors wrote about different situations of the enslaved becoming fugitives and running away from captivity after they were caught and brought to the nearest jail. While the authors discuss the ads as sources briefly, as well as the existence of jailer ads, they are primarily interested in what the ads as a whole reveal about the experiences of enslaved runaways and free people of color wrongfully enslaved. 14

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14 See Franklin and Schweninger, Runaway Slaves, pp. 170-208.
The historian who has perhaps given the most careful attention to the runaway ads and jailer ads is Jean Pierre Le Glaunec. His article “Title,” studies Louisiana ads from the early nineteenth century and argues that they are “one of the first examples of slave narrative and agency in early American Louisiana.” He also points to what the reader can glean from both types of ads, to greater and lesser degrees: “the reader is given to hear different interacting and conflicting voices: that of the master-narrator-editor and that of the slave speaking through reported speech.” Le Glaunec also spotlights, very briefly, the fact that the voices of enslaved people emerge from jailer ads, with the captured person playing the role of “story tellers” when jailers had to depend upon the alleged fugitive for information. The present thesis takes inspiration from Le Glaunec’s mention of jailer ads, while more deeply underscoring the differences between owner and jailer ads as sources for the study of slavery.

Jailer’s Advertisements

WAS arrested and brought to the Jail of New Orleans on the 12th ult an American negro man named Lewis, who says he belongs to Daniel Morlimer, Gibsonport, Miss. Said negro is aged about 26 years, 5 feet 1 inch high, having two fingers of the right hand cut off at the second joint, with a heavy beard. The owner is requested to claim him agreeably to law.

S MEILLEUR, Jailer.

The New Orleans Argus August 7, 1828

16 Le Glaunec, “Writing the Runaways,” 231.
The jailer ads, like the runaway slave advertisements, can be found mixed in with announcements for schools, church lotteries, missing animals, ship that docked at the port, government legislation, and elections. The advertisements are obviously a part of everyday life of the people of the city. Where the advertisements are placed in the paper could show their importance to the newspaper. The runaway slave advertisements would state whether the slave owners were the subscriber or not at the beginning.

In the Argus, on September 10, 1828, in the second column on the first page, can be found two sections entitled Runaway Negroes and Detained in Jail. Under “Runaway Negroes,” there were three advertisements. Two were male and the other female. Under “Detained in Jail” there were ten total, two females and eight males. Among the advertisements of the enslaved who ran away, multiple languages were spoken, various skin tones, ages, and heights. Most concluded with an order from the jailer to the owner mandating that he or she comply with the law and retrieve their property. Some ads included a statement indicating that the owner would have to prove that the fugitive belonged to them.

New Orleans Argus, September 10, 1828

RANAWAY from the plantation of the subscriber, on the 21st inst. A Negro slave, named FREDERICK. Said slave is about 22 years of age, 5 feet 4 inches high, very black, his eyes lively, and his hair always combed and frizzled—speaks only English. A reward of $20 will be paid to whoever will apprehend him and lodge him in any place of safety. Captains of vessels and others, are requested not to harbor said slave, as the severest penalties of the law shall be enforced against persons so transgressing. DR.

LABRANCHE a23 Parish St. Charles

New Orleans Argus, September 10, 1828
WAS brought to the jail of the parish of st. John the Baptist. On the 26th August, a young negro, named Mathias Clarke, handsome face, aged 23 to 24, 5 feet 6 inches high, says he is free, and from Lexington; is a barber; knows how to write; has been steward on board of a steamboat; claims the protection of Mr Scott of New Orleans. The owner is requested to claim his property. Pay the expenses and take him away. sept 6—6th
L TREPANNIER Jailer.

Contrary to what is usually found in working with jailer and runaway advertising, in these examples above there seems to have been more information given in the jailer (detained) advertisements than in the runaway advertisements. This particular comparison demonstrates that jailer ads could offer a way of seeing enslaved people through a more objective set of eyes than those of their enslaver. Generally, however, in many of the jailer advertisements under review here, much is unknown. For instance, the question of how and why the alleged fugitive ran away is impossible to know. The standard information that appeared in most jailer ads was limited to a name, sex, height, age, the clothes that were worn, spoken language or languages, physical features, owner’s name (if the detained revealed one) and where to retrieve them.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Jailer Advertisements</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Families</th>
<th>Male Younger than 18</th>
<th>Female Younger than 18</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>204</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Printed more than once</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out of State</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Claimed to be Free</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Name</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noted injuries</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wearing Iron Shackles</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jail Escape</td>
<td>1 (3 in one)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above is an index of some classifications that appeared in jailer ads in the 1828 *Argus*. Several of the ads fell into more than one category. These themes illuminate both the level of surveillance practiced by jailers on the enslaved population and the population of free people of color whose freedom was always in question, and the level of mobility and determined resistance

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17 This table was created from the eight hundred and nine advertisements used for the study.
of enslaved people seeking to elude owners and jailers, in essence testing this system of surveillance when possible.

**Visible Signs of Resistance and Punishment**

One of the most frequent distinctions between owner advertisements and jailer advertisements concerns the evidence of previous punishments worn on the bodies of the fugitive. These could be scars on the body (which are often described in owner advertisements also if they can assist in identification of a person) but also iron shackles and collars worn by fugitives. Such devices, as well as the scars, are more evidence of resistance on the part of the enslaved and the cruel strategies of their enslaver.

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**Iron Yolk Slave Collar, 19th century, 24.8 cm x 17.5 cm x 10 cm,**
From the John A. Andrew artifact collection, Massachusetts Historical Society Collections Online

*New Orleans Argus, June 2, 1828*

IN Baton Rouge Jail, a negro woman who says she belongs to Paul Sheppe, of the parish of West Baton Rouge. She is about 35 years of age, 5 feet and 1-2 inch in height, yellow complexion, and much scarred with the whip. The owner is requested to comply with the law and take her away.

May 21. J. SIMPSON, jailer
New Orleans Argus, August 1, 1828

DETAINED IN JAIL.

WAS brought to the jail of the parish of St. James, on the 22d of July 1828, an American negro, who speaks English only; calls himself George, and says he belongs to Mr. Aime, living in 5 feet 8 and a half inches high American measure. Said negro was fired at and wounded with shot, but not dangerously. Parish St. James, July 24.

July 29 CERISAY, Shff

New Orleans Argus, August 6, 1828

IN Baton Rouge Jail, a mulatto man who says he belongs to Mr. Bessy, living at the Devil’s Swamp, in this parish. He is 5 feet 9 inches in height, about nose, has whiskers and thick lips, and has also an iron ring on his left ankle. The owner in requested to comply with the law and take him away.

march 25 J. SIMPSON, Jailer.

Waterways as Pathways

Because New Orleans was a major American city before the Civil War, people came from other states over land and by boat for business, often bringing their enslaved human property with them. Some of those slaves found a way to escape from their owners while here. After
1828, throughout the South, it would become increasingly dangerous for free people of color to travel in the South for fear of being apprehended as an alleged fugitive. The case of Solomon Northup, kidnapped in Washington, D.C. in 1841 and sold to Louisiana, is one example of many free people of color unlawfully enslaved in the Antebellum South. Despite the danger, because it was such an active port, black sailors, free and enslaved, frequented the city throughout the nineteenth century. The Mississippi River as well as the Gulf of Mexico offered opportunities for flight for the enslaved. When apprehended, some fugitives claimed to be free people. Henry Scott, for instance, declared himself a free man, claimed to have escaped from a slave ship that had entered the port of New Orleans from the Gulf of Mexico, but he had actually escaped from upriver in St. James Parish.

Even when mentions of steamboats and working sailors were absent from jailer ads, the geography of escape and detention clearly followed the River. The jailers who placed these ads were more often than not located in river parishes near New Orleans—such as St. James, St. Charles and St. John the Baptist parishes, collectively referred to as the “German Coast”—and the trajectories of the alleged fugitives, as the jailers reported them, followed the River, from as far away as Vicksburg and Baton Rouge.

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19 Cases in the records of the Louisiana State Supreme Court document the claims of free men of color who were kidnapped but managed to sue for their freedom. Schafer stated in her book Slavery, the Civil Law, and the Supreme Court of Louisiana that under the American governance, the enslaved could only sue using Article 177 of the 1825 Civil Code found on page 220.
The above advertisements show the differences between two advertisements describing an alleged enslaved male claiming to be free.

New Orleans Argus, March 1, 1828

DETAINED in the jail of the Parish of Jefferson, an American negro, calling himself Adam Raute, aged 37 years, about 4 feet 8 inches high, says and that he belongs to John Fay, residing at Memphis, and that he came to New-Orleans in a boat called the Western Trader. The Owner is requested to comply with the law.

GEORGE DE PASSAU, Sheriff.

Parish of Jefferson, Feb 29

New Orleans Argus, March 4, 1828

DETAINED in the jail of the parish of St. James; the 25th of February, 1828, an American negro who speaks English only, calling himself George; and who says he belongs to doctor Perkins, of Centerville, Harrison county, Kentucky, on the road to Lexington. The said negro is aged about 23 to 25 years, 5 feet 7inches high, English measure, has on a pair of colored cottonade pantaloons, a white round jacket, and old black hat. Said negro says he escaped from, the steamboat Marietta, which landed in descending the river to take in wood in this parish, where he was stopped.

March 4

CERISAY, Sheriff.
New Orleans Argus, May 1, 1828

RUNAWAY detained in the parish jail of New Orleans, was stopped and lodged in said jail on the 11th instant, an American negro who speaks English only, calls himself Frank, and says he belongs to Mr. Robert Beall, sugar planter, 24 miles above the city, and on the same side of the river. Said negro is 5 feet high, black skin, long face, a great deal of beard, a small scar above his left brow. Says he was brought from Kentucky last January, by Mr. A. Burnett, who left him in charge of the said Mr. Beall. The owner is requested to claim him according to law.

April 29

SIMON MILLEUR, Jailer

New Orleans Argus, May 1, 1828

DETAINED in jail of German Coast, twelve leagues from New-Orleans, on the right bank of the river, on the 3rd of this month, a negro named Louis, aged about 21 or 22 years, having a scar on his forehead, about 5 feet 4 inches high, French measure, belonging to Mr. Live; he says he came from New Orleans, when he was stopped. The owner must prove his property, pay the expenses, and take him away.

P. L. TREPPANIER,

Parish of St. John the Baptist, ap 28 Jailer.

New Orleans Argus, August 1, 1828

WAS brought to the jail of the parish of St. James, on the 21st July inst; 1st, A mulatto, who speaks English only, calls himself Henderson, and says he belongs to Mr. Lewis, sugar planter in the parish of St. Charles. The said mulatto is aged about 26 years; 5 feet 8 inches high, has on a pair of blue cottonade pantaloons; a white linen shirt, and brown cloth coatee, with brass buttons, and brodequins. 2nd, an American griffe, who speaks English only; calls himself Gurley, and says he belongs to the same master; aged about 24 years; 5 feet 5 and a half inches high, English measure; has on a pair of blue cottonade pantaloons; a round jacket of northern cloth, and a blue shirt, The owner of the said slaves is requested to claim them agreeably to law.

Parish St. James, July 25. CERISAY, Shff.

New Orleans Argus, June 2, 1828

DETAINED in the Jail of the Parish of St. James, on the 23d inst, an American Negro who speaks English only; calls himself BILL, and belongs to Mr. John Thomas, a negro trader living at Baton Rouge; aged about 22 to 24 years; 5 feet 6 inches high, English measure; clothed with a pair of blue cottonade pantaloons, a shirt and vest of white woolen, and a blanket coat.

CERISAY, Sheriff

Parish of St. James, May 28, 1828.
New Orleans Argus, August 8, 1828

**DETAILED IN JAIL:**

WAS arrested and brought to the Jail of New Orleans, on the 1st ult. an American negro who calls himself Ellick, and who says he belongs to Mr Minisse, 20 miles above Vicksburg, at Milligan's Bend. Said negro is aged about 20 to 22 years, 4 feet 9 inches high, with no apparent mark, but little beard. The owner is requested to claim him agreeably to law. S MEILLEUR, Jailer.

New Orleans Argus, August 8, 1828

**BATON ROUGE JAIL.—A mulatto named Isaac, aged about 28 years, 5 feet 9 inches in height, has one tooth out on the front part of his upper jaw; says he belongs to Dr Rigaud, living on the coast a little above New-Orleans. The owner is requested to come with the law and take him away.**

P SIMPSON, Jailer.

New Orleans Argus, July 8, 1828

WAS brought to the jail of German Coast, 36 miles above New Orleans, on the right bank on the 1st of this month, a griffe named Henry, aged about 20 to 25 years, about 5 feet 3 or 4 inches high, French measure, belonging, he says, to Mr. Montgomery, in New Orleans. The owner is requested to prove his property, pay charges and take him away.

P L TREPANNIER, Jailer.

Parish of St. John the Baptist, July 1

**Captured Youth**

This group, Captured Youth, includes some of the youngest people to run away and be apprehended by jailers. In addition to the two young males mentioned below, also mentioned are a young woman of 16 and children who ran with their mother and father (see next section). Children separated from family or suffering from an abusive owner were the most likely to flee.
In *Runaway Slaves*, Franklin and Schweninger stated that young men would have run away more often because they were usually unencumbered by family and were more willing to defy their owners, and they believed that if they wait too long before they tried to run, it would be too late for them.\(^20\)

*The New Orleans Argus*, August 5, 1828

RUNAWAY Slave detained in the Police Jail of New Orleans. Was arrested and brought to the Jail on the 28th May last, a young American negro who calls himself Cesar, and, says he belongs to Mr. Thomas Beaver, of Kentucky. The said negro is aged about from 10 to 12 years, four feet high, having some scars on the right shoulder, arm and hand, on the left arm, occasioned by a burn. The said negro was not advertised before owner is requested to claim him agreeably to law.

SIMON MEILLEUR, Jailer

Jailer Advertisement

Owner Advertisement

 Argus- July 1, 1828

 Argus- June 2, 1828

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\(^20\) Franklin and Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves*, chap. 9.
**New Orleans Argus, July 1, 1828**

**DETAINED IN JAIL.**

RUNAWAY now detained in the Police Jail of New Orleans. --- Was taken up and brought to said jail on the 5th of the present month, a young American mulatto who calls himself Moses, and says he belongs to W Chison, segar maker, opposite the Red Church; said mulatto is 4 feet 9 inches high, aged about 14 to 16 years, very long feet and very flat, without any visible mark. The owner is requested to claim him according to law.

June 27

SIMON MEILLEUR, jailer.

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**Female Detainees**

As is clear from Table # 3, far fewer women were apprehended by jailers than men. Men outnumbered female runaways throughout the Antebellum period. In rural areas, men had more opportunity for traveling between plantations with the permission of owners. And in cities, enslaved women were often working in markets and on steamships, and arguably more familiar as a public presence and less likely to be suspected as runaways.21 Because of these circumstances in New Orleans, enslaved women could blend in and thus escape capture. But in 1828, as evidenced by the Argus, some women were choosing to run, and in one case, a jailer reportedly apprehended a whole family in flight.

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21 There were many reasons why women and girls would become fugitive, and one of the reasons was to reunite with family and friends. Mary Niall Mitchell “Lurking but Working: City Maroons in Antebellum New Orleans,” (unpublished paper in the author’s possession) p. 11.
The advertisements above showed the difference between the jailer and the owner advertisements involving female runaways. The jailer could only advertise the information that he was given, and he cannot know for sure if what she said was completely true. In contrast, the owner’s advertisement is very detailed, with personal information known by an owner trying to recover his property.

One of the women in this section has no name, age, or knowledge of where she lives, but she knew her owner. Despite this lack of information, the jailer had to give enough of a description so that the readers of the newspaper could identify her. This advertisement includes the description “extremely ignorant,” an uncommon label in the advertisements that stands out because of the “extremely” designation. What she did know was her owner’s name, how to make a dress, and, because she did try to escape, she knew that there had to be a better place for her somewhere else. She might not have known in what direction she was going or to where exactly she was running, but she would try.
The New Orleans Argus, June 2, 1828

RUNAWAY in Jail – Was committed to the Jail of this place on the 28th ult, a Negro Woman who says she belongs to Doct: Pipkin (but knows not where he lives). Said slave is dark complected, thick lips and large red eyes; extremely ignorant; her clothing is a coarse white homespun dress, and a handkerchief about her neck, all of which appears quite clean. The owner is requested to comply with the law in such cases made and provided.

R C BLOUNT, Dep Sheriff

St Francisville, June 3, 1828

New Orleans Argus, June 2, 1828

IN Baton Rouge Jail, a negro woman who says she belongs to Paul Sheppe, of the parish of West Baton Rouge. She is about 35 years of age, 5 feet and 1-2 inch in height, yellow complexion, and much scarred with the whip. The owner is requested to comply with the law and take her away.

May 21. J. SIMPSON, jailer

The New Orleans Argus, June 2, 1828

RUNAWAY in Jail – Was committed to the Jail of this place on the 28th ult, a Negro Woman who says she belongs to Doct: Pipkin (but knows not where he lives). Said slave is dark complected, thick lips and large red eyes; extremely ignorant; her clothing is a coarse white homespun dress, and a handkerchief about her neck, all of which appears quite clean. The owner is requested to comply with the law in such cases made and provided.

R C BLOUNT, Dep Sheriff

St Francisville, June 3, 1828-4

New Orleans Argus, February 1, 1828

ESCAPED, by breaking the jail of the parish of Jefferson, on the night of Tuesday, 15th inst. Josiah White, a debtor, about 5 feet 6 inches in height, of a slender make, pale complexion and thin visage, aged about 28 years, dressed as an ordinary boatman. Escaped at the same time, a negro man named Absalom, aged about 45 years, 5 feet 4 or 5 inches in height, countenance thin and very black, somewhat lame in the right leg, and has a sore in the neck from a wound lately inflicted. Also, a negro girl, aged 18 or 20
years, short and very stout, had a ring fastened to one of her legs---her proprietor unknown. It is presumed that the jail was broken by the said Josiah White, as he had been lodged therein the same evening only.

GEORGE DE PAPAU, Sheriff.

Parish of Jefferson, Jan. 16, 1827.

New Orleans Argus, May 5, 1828

RUNAWAYS IN JAIL. ---Committed to the jail of the parish of West Feliciana, state of Louisiana, on the 16th day of April, instant, four negroes, to with Jim, and Fanny his wife, and their 2 children Margaret and Martha. Jim is a stout and very black fellow, and says himself and family belong to John Johnson, of Warren county, Mississippi. He is about 30 years of age, Fanny is about 22, Margaret is about 3, and Martha is about 1 year old. The children have on each a calico dress, red grounded; Margaret has on a pair of shoes, and Martha a small head dress of coarse linen; Jim has a good cotton shirt, drab pantaloons, and a very good narrow brimmed hat. The owner of said slaves is required to comply with the law in such cases made and provided, and take them away. R. C. BLOUN, D S.

St. Francisville, April 22

First-Run Jailer Advertisements from the Group Studied

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Months</th>
<th>Feb</th>
<th>Mar</th>
<th>Apr</th>
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<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The chart above shows the total number of jailer advertisements used for this research. It is broken down to show the total number of enslaved included in those advertisements. The scope of the advertisements can be seen by using a percentage to show the number of jailer and runaway advertisements that were in English and in French. In the fugitive slave advertisements
studied during the eight-month period, 53.77% were in French and 46.23% in English (jailer ads in English made up 25.22% of the total and runaway ads in English made up 21.01%).

**Conclusion**

About most enslaved people, we know very little. However, fugitive slave ads fill in our knowledge with an amazing range of detail, pointing out the diversity of the slave population and in turn providing insight into the lives of the enslaved. Even though jailer ads held fewer details than ads placed by those who knew the enslaved personally and could describe details of their habits, language, talents and abilities, they also reveal much about these otherwise nameless people. Through the short eight months covered here, captured individuals ran the gauntlet of age, situation, willingness to share their identifications. Ages ranged from one year to sixty-five years of age. Some gave the jailers their names, and some feigned not knowing them, or were unwilling to reveal them. In addition, looking at New Orleans through the jailer advertisements of the 1828 *New Orleans Argus* illuminates the institution of slavery within the context of a working and growing metropolitan area, rather than the enslaved on the plantation or in rural areas. Each jailer advertisement gives a glimpse of the life of an enslaved person caught in the web of urban policing that worked within the larger institution of slavery. It is hoped that as more researchers make use of these advertisements, the distinctions between jailer advertisements and owner advertisements will be recognized. A careful analysis of jailer advertisements could help open more doors to understanding how the slave market worked in an urban area.

On the website of the National Humanities Center, alongside interviews collected in the early twentieth century by the Federal Writers’ Project, is found this description of the slave
narratives: “Six recount their own escapes from slavery; others describe helping runaways, witnessing punishments, planning their own escapes, reuniting with a fugitive parent, and seeing long-hidden fugitives ‘come out from the woods from all directions’ when the Civil War ended.”

"This is what I know, not what somebody else say," we are assured by Margrett Nickerson, interviewed over seventy years after emancipation, "'I seen this myself.'"22

One of the challenges in analyzing the advertisements was trying to fit them into categories that could best describe, with the limited information available, the stories of these fugitives from slavery. But understanding the jailer advertisements as echoes of conversations between jailers and enslaved expands their usefulness as sources for understanding the institution of slavery, the experiences of the enslaved and the means by which they might have resisted their bondage and the surveillance under which they lived.

[22 http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/pds/maai/enslavement/text8/text8read.htm]
Bibliography


Vita

Tara Garbutt was born and raised in New Orleans, Louisiana, where she graduated from Warren Easton Fundamental Senior High School. Before her graduation from Warren Easton, she joined the United States Army Reserve and still serves in the reserves as a sergeant. In fall 2012, Tara enrolled at the University of New Orleans with some college credit already gained. At UNO, she worked on the Freedom on the Move project at the Midlo Center for New Orleans Studies and volunteered at the Louisiana State Museum. After her graduation from UNO in 2014, Tara continued volunteering at the Louisiana State Museum. In 2015, Tara began graduate school at UNO where she served an internship with the Ashé Cultural Art Center, processing documents for placement in a researchable collection to be housed at the Amistad Research Center at Tulane University. Her Ashé work led to an internship in archiving at Amistad Research Center and her current employment at the Ashé Cultural Art Center.