


## Naming Names of Enslaved People in the Senegal Liberations Project

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### Abstract

Enslavement is linked to enduring and systemic inequalities, hierarchies, and to the erasures of enslaved people's histories, including their names. Such erasures meant and continue to mean different things to different populations of formerly enslaved people. Descendants of enslaved people, especially in the diaspora, turned to well-established means of genealogical research and new forms of DNA research to trace their ancestors. However, in West Africa and in other parts of the world where obvious racialized markers do not automatically hint at an enslaved ancestor, many former enslaved people “would rather forget” their enslaved past or that of their ancestors, precisely because descent from enslaved ancestry remains stigmatized. Ethical considerations of conducting digital historical research on slavery and emancipation have been hotly discussed for a number of years, and given the public-facing character of many of these digital projects, the stakes of naming versus anonymity are high. This article suggests a way forward for those people recorded in the Registers of Liberation in colonial Senegal.

## Introduction

Digital humanities projects have great potential to promote social justice and address inequities. Indeed, a key element of the digital humanities' ability to further social justice is its often public-facing character. Making information visible to a broad audience, typically via web-based projects, is a major factor in rendering untold or under-told stories visible and inspiring people beyond academic confines to seek a more just future. This is particularly true for projects which deal with historical injustices and the experiences of marginalized, silenced, and subjugated groups, such as enslaved or formerly enslaved individuals. A number of recent projects fit this paradigm, with initiatives focusing on the experiences of enslaved people throughout the world and during different historical eras leading the way in terms of availability, richness of data, and research output. The first and most significant digital project on enslavement is the Slave Voyages Database [Borucki et al. n.d.]. Other major projects include Liberated Africans [Chadha and Lovejoy n.d.], Fugitives from Slavery in Jamaica [Wood and Smith 2021], the Slave Societies Digital Archive [Landers et al. n.d.], and Freedom on the Move [Baptist n.d.]. Additionally, the Peoples of the Historical Slave Trade website is an ongoing initiative to consolidate the numerous and expanding projects on this topic [Rehberger et al. n.d.].

While such digital humanities projects serve an important role in addressing historical injustices and elevating the voices of the oppressed, their public visibility poses ethical challenges. All researchers bear an ethical responsibility toward their subjects, whether formalized through institutional frameworks like Institutional Review Board (IRB) protocols or as an often-unstated backdrop to their research methods and production. The stakes are arguably higher for projects that are published online and are thus readily available to a global audience because ethical missteps or inattention to the possible harms to research subjects have the potential to reverberate across the web and deep into affected communities. Consequently, digital humanities scholars have in recent years articulated ethical frameworks to guide research and publication, including data presentation and visualization [Saagsma 2023] [Thykstrup 2022] [Profess 2021] [Hepworth and Church 2018]. However, in some cases clear-cut best practices prove elusive. This is especially true for projects that discuss controversial topics or center historically marginalized communities, such as enslaved or formerly

enslaved people, the subject of the Senegal Liberations Project.

Slavery and enslavement always involve physical and social violence. Historical slavery contributed to enduring and systemic inequalities, hierarchies, and the erasure of enslaved people's histories, including their names. Such erasures meant and continue to mean different things to different populations of formerly enslaved people and their descendants. In many contexts, the violence of enslavement and various mechanisms of renaming rendered formerly enslaved people without history. The particular histories of enslavement hold ramifications for how descendants of enslaved people view this issue because the end of slavery did not end these forms of inequality and discrimination. In the Americas, the racialization of status persisted after emancipation, resulting in new forms of struggle and resistance. Descendants of formerly enslaved people, especially in the diaspora, turned to well-established means of genealogical research and new forms of DNA research to trace their ancestors. For this group, recovering their “names” and origins is important, as the trauma of the Middle Passage occluded their heritage. However, in West Africa and in other parts of the world where obvious racialized markers do not automatically hint at an enslaved ancestor, many former enslaved “would rather forget” their enslaved past or that of their ancestors precisely because descent from enslaved ancestry remains stigmatized.

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Such questions of naming and anonymity extend to contemporary research. Ethical considerations of conducting digital historical research on slavery and emancipation have been hotly discussed for a number of years [Odumosu 2020] [Dalgeish 2011] [Martina 2014]. Given the public-facing character of many of these digital projects, the stakes of naming versus anonymity are high. While digital projects on enslavement can promote public engagement with historical injustices, scholarly research, and pedagogical innovations, they also risk re-dehumanizing enslaved individuals and their ancestors. Jessica Johnson challenges us to introduce social justice and ethics into digital enslaved studies in ways that “mark their humanity” by providing a “window into the everyday lives of Africans, who remained faceless, anonymous, disembodied” [Johnson 2018]. Using digital research to reclaim the humanity of enslaved individuals by tracing their origins and identities has emerged as an important frontier in this work. However, issues of naming versus anonymity for people descended from enslaved populations within Africa merit further consideration given the different attitudes toward enslaved ancestry, raising significant issues regarding the ethics of naming the names of enslaved people. This article suggests a way forward for those people recorded in the Registers of Liberation in colonial Senegal, the topic of the Senegal Liberations Project.

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We approach our project as a case study showcasing how we addressed a question with major ethical ramifications: whether or not to include the names of enslaved individuals who obtained liberation on a publicly available website. Although this may seem like a simple question, reaching a decision about what to do required discussions between scholars and stakeholders in Senegal, Europe, and North America, as well as reflections on our responsibility to both the people whose lives are recorded in historical sources and their descendants. We also drew on ethical guidelines that similar research initiatives have developed [Rehberger et al. n.d.] [Agostino 2019] [Johnson 2018]. After much debate, reflections, and further research in these sources, we ultimately decided to include names on the SLP website. How we arrived at this decision requires discussion of the history of enslavement in West Africa and a deep dive into our sources. Our case study of the ethics of naming versus anonymity will hopefully be of use not only to other scholars of enslavement and liberation, but also digital humanities researchers working on public-facing projects utilizing ethically complex sources more broadly.

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## The Registers of Liberation in Colonial Senegal and the Senegal Liberations Project

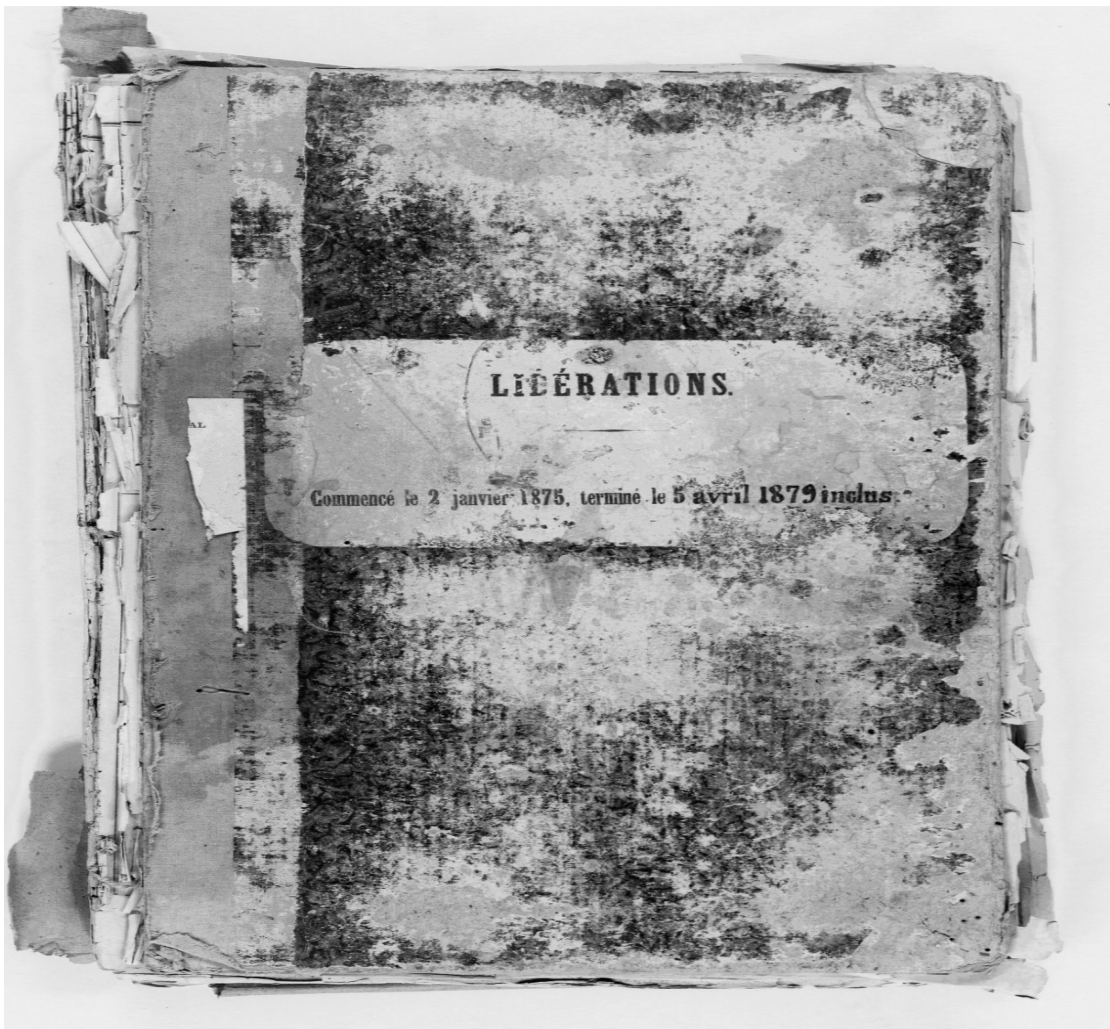
These were the political and ethical concerns we had when we began the process of mining the French colonial Registers of Liberation in Senegal from 1857 to 1903, which recorded the enslaved Africans who sought their liberation by presenting themselves before French colonial officials. France had decreed the abolition of slavery throughout its empire on 27 April 1848. Article 7 of that decree stated that “the principle that the soil of France frees the slave who touches it is applied in colonies and possessions of the Republic” [French Republic 1848]. In 1848, the enslaved people in the two tiny towns that constituted the French colony of Senegal (Gorée and Saint-Louis) were freed, but not all left their owners, who were mostly African and *métis* inhabitants of these towns [Guèye 1965] [Klein 1998] [Getz 2004]

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[Westland 2022]. Enslaved people from neighboring African communities and polities began streaming into these colonial towns seeking their liberation. Due to commercial and political considerations that threatened the viability of the colony, Governor Faidherbe decreed in 1855 that the 1848 abolition applied only to French citizens, not subjects of the French empire, and that enslaved people fleeing to French territory from friendly African polities were to be considered vagabonds and expelled. Fugitive enslaved peoples from African polities fighting against the French would be welcomed subject to a waiting period and subject to a redemption fee. Many of those entering the process were enslaved minors, who were subsequently entrusted to named adults for whom the minors continued to work until they turned 18 [Moitt 2024]. To keep track of the process, Faidherbe introduced the Registers of Liberation in 1857 [Faidherbe 1857].

At the outset, the liberations were recorded in handwritten ledgers consisting of nine columns: a number in order of liberation, the date, the name of the person making the declaration to the colonial official (often the enslaved person or the enslaver, who was seeking the redemption fee), the name of the enslaved period and the enslaved person's place of origin, their age, the destination where the liberated individual would live, names of the individual with whom the liberated individual would live, and signatures of the declarant. In 1875, the ledgers changed and so did the flow of enslaved people seeking liberation. Political conflicts within and between African polities contributed to the increase in enslaved people leaving their enslavers. This process accelerated further after 1883. Pre-printed forms began to be used and the content of the columns changed. Eight columns now included the number in order of liberation, date of liberation, the profession of the declarant (who was now mostly the colonial official), the name and place of birth of the liberated individual, their age, the names of the liberated person's father and mother if known, the name and profession of the guardian to whom the liberated individual was conferred if that individual was an unaccompanied minor, and the signature of the declarant. By 1883, the French colonial officials abolished all restrictions on offering liberation and those seeking liberation were offered freedom certificates the same day they applied [Renault 1972]. Most of the enslaved people seeking liberation from this period forward were those fleeing their enslavers from elsewhere in Senegal.

Overall, the registers consist of twenty handwritten ledgers from 1857-1903 and record around 28,421 cases of enslaved people in colonial Senegal seeking to obtain from French officials legal documentation of their liberation. The registers are held in the National Archives of Senegal. With permission of the archives, Stanford University acquired a microfilm of the registers, which sat unused until 2018, when we launched the Senegal Liberations Project. Again, with permission from the National Archives of Senegal, we digitized the microfilm images in order to enhance them for research. We also returned a copy of the digital images to the archives in Senegal, which serves as a form of data preservation since the original registers are deteriorating.



That same year we began entering the liberation data into Excel sheets reflecting the information in the pre-printed columns in which most of the liberations were recorded. Our goal was to build a public-facing website in order to make available this fascinating source to a wider audience in Senegal and throughout the world.

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At the beginning of our data entry, we were concerned about the enduring stigma of enslaved descent in Senegal and whether to include the names of the enslaved people seeking their liberation because having enslaved ancestors continues to carry social stigma in West Africa and many whose ancestors were enslaved prefer to keep this past hidden. We consulted with Senegalese colleagues and scholars, who were mostly urban-based and who were less concerned with this issue than we were. Nonetheless, we proceeded with data entry without naming the names of the liberated individuals, moving from the most recent records backwards in part because the ledgers were in better shape and because the handwriting was more legible. Our initial goal was to identify quantitative trends in the evidence of liberation, which resulted in a preliminary analysis of 10,000 cases of liberation from 1895-1904 [Goodwin et al. 2021]. Our initial results demonstrated significant agency on the part of the enslaved people who most often strategically fled their owners during the slow period of the agricultural cycle in order to arrive at their liberation destination in time to begin planting crops for their own subsistence. A central task of digital humanities is to visualize data in order to make intelligible trends and patterns to a wider audience. Even though these quantitative trends demonstrated human agency, they still did not capture the individual lived experiences of the enslaved as they sought their liberation and thus did not fully capture the challenge laid out by Jessica Johnson and others to better “mark their humanity” [Johnson 2018]. This realization brought us to the following reflections on the politics and ethics of naming names in public-facing digital humanities projects.

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## Places: To Stay or To Leave

There is no easy answer to the simple question: to name or not to name? Answering this in an ethical and responsible

way requires careful consideration of the historical specificity of enslavement and liberation in Senegal and the wider region of French West Africa. The end of slavery must always be situated in specific locations. These places were almost always deeply saturated by power asymmetries and social hierarchies as well as resistance to them. Even in decentralized societies where hierarchies were thinly structured, power emanating from more centralized polities nearby shaped status and slavery within those societies. The end of slavery did not mean the end of these power asymmetries or hierarchies; they may have shifted slightly to adapt to the changed circumstances, but absent radical ruptures, they persisted and imposed significant limits on the meanings of the end of slavery to the formerly enslaved [Miers and Roberts 1988] [Lovejoy and Hogendorn 1993] [Klein 1998]. The FulBe of central Mali use the metaphor of the rope to indicate how in post-slavery societies persistent cultures of hierarchy, the stigma of slave descent, and poverty limited the social mobility of formerly enslaved people who remained bound to the former enslavers. To be bound to a former enslaver is also to remain within a network of reciprocity and subsistence security. To remain within the rope requires the retention of the stigma of enslaved descent and to be known as such. “To cut the rope”, in contrast, is to separate from the place where the former enslavers’ power persists, to risk subsistence security, and embrace precarity, at least temporarily or until a new set of ropes were established [Pelckmans 2011, 6–32] [Bellagamba 2009, 69].<sup>[1]</sup>

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Most population centers in Senegal, Mali, and Mauritania in the middle to end of the nineteenth century were relatively small. The majority of people lived in villages and hamlets; urban-like agglomerations that served as central places or seats of political or religious authority were few and most had a seasonal quality during which they swelled a bit during the dry season and shrunk again during the rainy season when most people turned to farming or led their herds to green pastures. French colonial outposts like Saint Louis developed urban attributes fueled by an expansion in commerce, which required a built infrastructure and a labor force of both skilled and unskilled workers, many of whom were enslaved [Klein 1998, 21–25] [Searing 1993, ch. 3]. During the second half of the nineteenth century, colonial urban spaces expanded in number and scale. Still, most people lived in villages where social stratification consisted largely of endogamous social categories: free people who could be poor or wealthy; casted groups of those who controlled skills such as ironwork, praise singing, and leatherwork; and enslaved people who consisted of the newly enslaved and those born into the house. In the West African savannah, ethnic groups often identified themselves by economic and cultural boundaries, although there was movement across these ethnic boundaries. The second half of the nineteenth century also witnessed the rise of several warrior states and militant Islamic revival movements that fueled the expansion of enslavement and the supply of newly enslaved people [Klein 1998, 209–217]. The influx of newly enslaved people into villages and emerging urban spaces certainly contributed to sharpening power asymmetries and cultures of hierarchy, which in turn may have led to hardening boundaries surrounding social stratification. Militant Islamic revival contributed to social stratification by dividing communities into believers and non-believers and into those who were legally considered Muslims and those considered only partially so.

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The influx of significant numbers of newly enslaved people into many West African societies during this period likely sharpened social stratification through endogamy — the rules and practices surrounding who can marry whom. “Endogamic marriage”, Alice Bellagamba reminds us, “ensures that moral, social, and material resources will circulate among people who are already related in one way or another” [Bellagamba 2020, 159–160]. Endogamy also contributed to enslavers’ ideology of “purity of blood” that, according to Ibrahima Thioub, contributed to the persistence of the stigma of inferiority among enslaved people and their descendants in societies where enslavers and enslaved people shared the same “chromaticity” [Thioub 2012]. While enslavers had powers of sexual access over enslaved women, marriages were restricted between free and enslaved people. Concubinage was widely practiced among Muslims, allowing enslavers to manumit their female concubines upon the birth of a child if the enslaver chose to recognize his child. Such endogamy persists to this day in villages and towns, which contributes to the enduring stigma of enslaved descent [Bellagamba 2020] [Pelckmans 2011]. As Paul Irwin notes for the villages surrounding Liptako, a primarily FulBe historical region that contains modern-day eastern Burkina Faso, southwest Niger, and southeastern Mali, “a social calculus based on kinship requires people to know their genealogies” and “genealogies are so inextricably bound up with notions of personal identity that no one neglects them entirely” [Irwin 1981, 43, 20]. The very nature of enslavement involves the rupture of genealogical continuities, which renders them “truncated” [Rodet 2010]. A truncated genealogy is thus a legacy of enslavement.

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In many ways, slave descent even long past the end of slavery remains central to social standing and expected behavior in communities where everyone knows everybody. Slave descent is, as Michael Taussig notes, a “public secret” which is simultaneously “revealing and concealing” [Taussig 1999, 16]. As such, a public secret entails “knowing and not knowing” predicated around the power and the obligation to keep the secret [Taussig 1999, 2] [Rossi 2009, 10]. Anthony Appiah describes his encounter with such a public secret:

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Once, when I was a child, I asked my father, in a room full of people, how we were related to a woman whom I knew and liked, who lived in one of the family houses. I thought of her, in fact, as one of my “aunts”. My father brushed the question angrily aside. Only later, when we were alone, did he say that one should never inquire after people's ancestry in public. She was, as it turned out, the descendant of a family slave. Everybody in the family knew this, and that meant that she was of lower status than the rest of us. As children, we were required to be courteous to all adults, even those of lower status. But that didn't mean they weren't inferior. [Appiah 2007, 253]

For those of us who study slavery and its legacies in Africa, the core questions are, as Martin Klein poses it: why, given the persistence of inferior social status, do formerly enslaved people remain in the same communities as their former enslavers and why do they continue to accept even minimal obligations of deference and subjugation [Klein 2006, 279]? Additionally, what are our obligations to the public secret of an individual's slave descent? Such questions are relevant throughout West Africa.

In the Senegal Liberations Project, the enslaved people seeking their freedom have specificity rooted in the sources' provenance in France's nascent West African Empire. Although the French had abolished slavery in its territories in 1848, French antislavery policy was largely subordinated to political expediency during the conquest phase. By 1898, the French had pursued conquest aggressively and while small-scale enslavement and the slave trade persisted, large-scale enslavement had ended with the military victory over the warriors states led by Amadu Tal, Samori Ture, and BaBemba. During the conquest phase, the French had not only tolerated slavery but returned runaway enslaved people to enslavers in polities that remained allied to them. In 1903, the French decreed a new colonial legal system which did not recognize the legal category of the slave and thus enslavers could not turn to the colonial state to enforce their rights over enslaved people. In effect, it “delegalized” slavery without abolishing it [Rossi 2024, 2, fn. 2]. In 1905, following the expansion of the slave exodus, the French decreed the prohibition of new enslavement. These two decrees effectively ended the legal status of slavery. But it did not end slavery or its legacies [Klein 1998] [Roberts 2005, ch. 4] [Lawrance and Roberts 2012].

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Klein has argued that around one million enslaved people in French West Africa left their enslavers in an exodus that started around 1896 and accelerated after 1905 [Klein 1998]. Klein also estimates that those who left their enslavers constituted only around one-third of the total number of enslaved people in this region. Not all of the remaining two-thirds (or two million enslaved people) remained with their enslavers; we do know that some not insignificant number separated from their former enslavers and formed new communities, sometimes nearby [Roberts 1988] [Rodet 2015] [Rodet 2019]. But clearly a significant number of enslaved people remained with their former enslavers.

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Examining these general statistics regarding the proportion of enslaved people who remained with their former enslavers, Igor Kopytoff argued that those who left were the most marginalized of the enslaved population, the least integrated into their enslavers' communities and cultures, and most likely the more recently enslaved. African slavery, in Kopytoff's view, was a system that was predicated on the progressive integration of enslaved people to the point where the enslaved would no longer be recognizable as such. In the Kopytoff system, enslaved people were eager for integration and belonging in their enslavers' societies, even at the expense of some residual discrimination. Kopytoff's view of the end of slavery was one of a stark dichotomy between belonging and separation, with no space for resistance and renegotiation [Kopytoff 1988]. While Kopytoff may have minimized the options available to enslaved people, we have come to appreciate more fully the risks involved in leaving even an exploitative relationship which offers some promise of subsistence security for an uncertain future.

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The promise of subsistence security does not quite resolve the problem of how to explain why some who have left

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returned to their former enslavers' communities, sometimes periodically and sometimes after decades away and after having secured significant alternative subsistence security. Lotte Pelckmans describes the case of Maman Abidjan, a descendant of an enslaved person, who left the village of Dalla and spent nearly four decades in the capital city of the Cote d'Ivoire, where she changed her identity to be part of a casted group, achieved a relative degree of security, and built a social network. Why then did she return to Dalla and why did she accept the subtle but persistent reminders of her subordinate status [Pelckmans 2011, 122, 155]?

Anthropologists have long been intrigued by the pattern of remittances and regular return visits to their natal villages by young male labor migrants. Claude Meillassoux has argued that lineage and household elders who remained in their home villages exerted significant control over matrimonial goods and the pool of brides, thus effectively controlling marriage eligibility. Without access to matrimonial goods, young men could not properly marry and therefore could not become elders within the ideological context still enforced by the elders. To access elderhood and, in turn, gain access to established modes of subsistence security through remittances from their own sons, young men had little choice but to remit their earnings to elders [Meillassoux 1981]. Building on Meillassoux's materialist argument, Charles Piot explores why long-term migrants in southern Togo periodically returned to their natal villages in the north, bringing money, consumer goods, and building materials, even though many of these migrants had settled in the south, built their own networks, and established families there. Piot discovered that these long-term migrants were drawn back home to participate in annual rituals precisely because such participation provided them with means to renew their belongingness to their natal communities and provide their children with a sense of historical continuities [Piot 1999]. But as James Ferguson reminds us, even those long-term migrants who settled in cities and mines and found security in stabilized work and pensions could find themselves confronting insecurity during financial and political crises. By investing in their home villages, these modern workers retained a measure of subsistence security and cultural belonging [Ferguson 1999]. Leaving with the intention of returning or leaving and periodically returning served to maintain connections, status, and belongingness.

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Leaving without the intention of returning, on the other hand, involved ruptures. Leaving put subsistence security at risk, sometimes for an indefinite period. Despite this, enslaved people did leave. Those who remembered their natal homes were inclined to leave; those whose lives grated against discrimination and diminished personhood of enslaved status and those who wanted to establish households that they could control may also have left. Some left in groups and others individually. Some left spontaneously while others planned their departures to coincide with the agricultural calendar, seeking to minimize subsistence insecurity by departing just after the harvest was in and before the new planting season began, in the expectation of arriving at a new place in time to resume farming [Goodwin et al. 2021, figure 1]. Making their way home or finding a new place to live almost always involved negotiating with chiefs and kin for access to land and entering into new forms of dependency. Enslaved people who left most likely calculated these costs and benefits and saw that moving was in their interests. Marie Rodet describes the challenges facing a group of enslaved people who left en masse from their enslavers only to find themselves struggling against hostility from neighboring villages and drought before they were able to establish new villages [Rodet 2019].

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We know relatively little about the planning that went into leaving, but certainly knowledge of political and economic conditions circulated among enslaved populations. This may have helped in deciding the direction of departure. Tapping into whatever kind of networks existed may also have helped enslaved people navigate their departures. Knowledge of destinations and knowledge of potential hosts in those destinations contributed to decisions to leave and facilitated integration into the new places. In the expanding peanut zone of Senegambia, hosts welcomed migrants and enslaved people and entered them into forms of dependency involving exchanges of labor or shares of the harvest in exchange for access to land and subsistence security. This was the well-established pattern of the stranger farmer or navetan system in the peanut zone [Klein 1998, ch. 12] [Swindell 2006] [Moitt 1989]. Formerly enslaved people may have found themselves in new dependency relationships that resembled slavery. Some may also have suffered from status discrimination [Bellagamba 2009] [Bellagamba 2020]. In other regions, formerly enslaved people could take new names and identities and eventually merge with the "free" peasant communities in which they were living [Klein 1998, ch. 12–14].

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Enslaved people could also join the proliferating number of Islamic communities that welcomed newcomers regardless

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of their status. Some of these communities promised access to land, subsistence, and learning, while others promised an emancipatory environment in which goods were shared and bridewealth prohibited. This stood in stark contrast to the mosques of their enslavers, where enslaved people and their descendants were unwelcome [Hanretta 2009] [Pelckmans 2011] [O'Brian 1975] [Babou 2007] [Searing 2002].

Hosts played important roles in migration to urban centers and other places where navigating the often-challenging housing and labor markets required significant help. Locating an urban host often meant tapping into existing diasporic networks that linked urban centers with rural villages. As Pelckmans describes, for migrants to Bamako, many of these hosts reproduced the cultural hierarchies from the rural villages preventing migrants from easily escaping established forms of dependency and discrimination [Pelckmans 2011].

Nonetheless, leaving provided formerly enslaved people with the possibility of getting “lost” [Pelckmans 2011, 249]. Getting lost meant complete rupture with their former dependencies and the opportunities to establish new identities and new networks. The social costs of such ruptures were considerable, but moving to new areas, founding new villages, or settling into new urban neighborhoods provided the opportunity to invent new identities, even if they may have been fictitious. New identities often involved new names. In such cases, taking on a new name was not a dehumanizing erasure, but part of an individual's claim to fuller social acceptance. The Registers of Liberation provide an important prequel to the better documented slaves' exodus of 1905 by documenting the ebbs and flows of enslaved people actively seeking their liberty in the fifty years prior to the exodus.

## Whose Name?

The meanings of naming and renaming vary from place to place and from context to context. Naming and renaming also reflect the violence and power asymmetries inherent in enslavement and slavery. The American historian Drew Gilpin Faust describes the multiple meanings embedded in ledgers kept by enslavers:

But sometimes handwritten documents tell stories that their creators neither intended nor understood. James Henry Hammond maintained a ledger in which he kept scrawled records of the births and deaths of the enslaved population on his South Carolina plantation. Because he included the names of newborns' parents and often some additional commentary, it was possible for me to reconstruct family ties among generations of people forbidden to keep their own written history. At one point, Hammond purchased an 8-year-old boy named Sam Jones to work in the house, changing his name to “Wesley” in the process. Nearly three decades later, “Hammond” recorded the birth of a son to Wesley: a child to whom Wesley had given the name “Sam Jones”. As he recorded the baby's birth, Hammond was in all likelihood unaware of Sam/Wesley's act of memory and resistance. [Gilpin Faust 2022]

Equiano recounts how one of his enslavers gave him the name Gustavus Vassa. Equiano used both names — Olaudah Equiano and Gustavus Vassa — as the author of his *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, Or Gustavus Vassa, The African*, first published in 1789. The use of both names stimulated a lively debate regarding the author's birth, his identity, and the authenticity of the narrative [Carretta 2005] [Lovejoy 2006]. This debate led to a reassessment of the fixedness of names and identities in the Atlantic world during the early modern period. Drawing from his study of Domingues Alvares, James Sweet argues that “the Atlantic represented a series of social deaths and rebirths, a repeating circuit of dislocation and dismemberment, marked by an unceasing desire to reconstitute the self through family, friends, and community. His was a history without end, quite literally a feedback loop of subjection and social subjectivities” [Sweet 2009, 304]. Far from being fixed and indelible, identities and names were “overlapping, shifting, and situational...” [Sweet 2009, 298].

Enslaved people who remained in Africa but were moved from where they were enslaved to where they were settled suffered similar social deaths and rebirths as their counterparts in the Atlantic world. Enslavement in any form was violent; it ruptured connections with kin and community. And it also ruptured genealogy. In the absence of robust research on naming practices in African societies, most of the evidence we have is drawn from the colonial period or ethnographic research in the recent past shaped by all the distortions those sources produce. On top of the physical



violence of capture, enslavers subjected newly enslaved people to the symbolic violence of renaming. Pelckmans notes that renaming the newly enslaved was a central part of asserting domination; it was part of enslavers' efforts to "erase the previous identity of their slaves.... The renaming of captured people consisted of the imposition of a completely new, often degrading identity.... Slave names were thus often a source of shame in contrast to the names of the freeborn, which invoked a freeborn status and honorable condition" [Pelckmans 2017, 257–258]. Gregory Mann suggests that newly enslaved people did not lose their patronyms (*jamuw*), which represents "an all-important identity marker" that is linked to genealogical history and myth. In contrast, enslaved people born into their enslaver's community (*wolosow*) were often given the patronym of their enslavers, which signified "integration" into the enslaver's household [Mann 2002, 308–312]. Different naming practices for enslaved people certainly prevailed throughout Africa, but both Pelckmans and Mann recognize the power of the enslaver to name or rename enslaved people. Both also recognize the power of enslavers to name the children of enslaved people. According to Pelckmans, enslaved women lacked a "legal husband" and therefore could not give the patronym of the father to their children [Pelckmans 2011, 262] [Klein 1989, 213].

Mann's larger argument, however, focused on the discrepancies between local practices of naming and renaming and the introduction of colonial bureaucracies in which registers of names for taxation and military recruitment assumed greater permanence of names. As Mann argues, changes in family names were "extremely common under colonial rule, particularly among soldiers" precisely because so many military recruits were drawn from the former enslaved population that remained near their former enslavers. Former enslaver and village chiefs were complicit in this process whereby formerly enslaved people assumed the patronym of their former enslaver and thus substituted for their former enslaver's sons in the recruitment process. Formerly enslaved people also drew from a wider array of patronyms. Mann refers to this practice as assuming "names of convenience" [Mann 2002, 39].

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Maintaining registers of names for taxation and recruitment was central to the instruments of governmentality, which formed a core component of making local people legible to the state. As James Scott and his colleagues argue, "In the case of colonial rule, when the conquerors speak an entirely different language, the unintelligibility of the vernacular landscape is a nearly insurmountable obstacle to effective rule. Renaming much of the landscape therefore is an essential step of imperial rule.... Like place names, permanent surnames help to chart the human topography of any region" [Scott et al. 2002, 6–7]. However, the process of inventing surnames and rendering them legible and indelible by including them in official ledgers was messy. The process relied on literate clerks, few of whom were trained in the variety of indigenous and local languages, and on pressures of time to process individuals into these ledgers expeditiously.

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Two aspects of this messy process merged when recording evidence of enslaved people in the Registers of Liberation. First, clerks who did not necessarily know or understand local languages transcribed what they heard into names that they could more easily recognize [Clark 2015]. Clerks may have drawn upon a limited pool of surnames that may have had some tonal kinship with the name presented by the individual supplicant. Oscar Moráquez captures well some of these issues in his discussion of the African origins of slaves imported into Cuba:

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Planters, lawyers, colonial authorities, and notaries generated lists and descriptions of slaves — for parish records, property records of individual estates, marriages, baptisms, runaway notices, bills of slave sales, and the like — many of which identified African-born slaves by geographic or linguistic criteria or by imputed nationality. The people who compiled these lists recognized cultural variants, but they did not know much about Africa itself.... [Moráquez 2008, 176–177]

Instead, these clerks "automatically labeled" individuals as belonging to groups just because of where in Africa they embarked on slave ships [Moráquez 2008, 176–177] [Misevich 2008, 156].<sup>[2]</sup> In his study of the Havana Registers of Liberated Africans, Henry Lovejoy argues that most African languages were phonetic and what names clerks entered into the registers reflected the tonal structures of their own native languages [Lovejoy 2010].

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The second aspect builds on the established practices of enslaved people to rename themselves or be renamed. Taking the opportunity of redefining oneself at the moment of being recorded in ledgers, enslaved and formerly enslaved

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people could present themselves as having whatever surname they wished. As Pelckmans notes, “Slaves and their descendants have been most concerned to change their surnames”, which then become “tickets to social mobility” [Pelckmans 2017, 267, 277]. Thus, the initiative of the enslaved to rename themselves in order to potentially disguise their enslaved origins and the often-sloppy practices of actually recording names in official ledgers means that we do not really know if the names being recorded were “authentic” or invented. This process thus resulted in what Scott refers to paradoxically as “rampant name pluralism” [Scott et al. 2002, 29]. How do places and practices of naming and renaming, as well as the “authenticity” of recorded names, influence whether we should include names of enslaved people in our research?

## Naming Names and the Paths to Freedom

The ethical and political dimensions regarding naming the names of enslaved people are also shaped by the means through which they achieved their liberation. We can identify four broad paths to freedom: 1) enslavers offered manumission to individual enslaved people; 2) states mandated abolition through a decree that formally ended enslavement; 3) naval squadrons and subsequently international courts liberated enslaved people on ships, imposing treaties that prohibited the slave trade and placed enslaved people within apprenticeships for some length of time; and 4) enslaved people sought their own freedom through self-purchase, through the courts, or by fleeing to spaces where they could not be found by their enslavers or where slavery was outlawed. Each of these paths has implications for the status of formerly enslaved people and on the wider political, cultural, and social environment in which the paths took place. These different pathways to freedom also have implications for our discussion about the ethical and political issues regarding whether to name the freed people or not. As we argue, those enslaved people in the Senegal Liberations Project actively sought their own freedom, which involved securing a certificate of liberty in their name from French colonial officials. Their agency in this regard is essential to how we resolved the ethical and political concerns for this project.

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Manumission was an individual act by enslavers that freed one or several enslaved people. Enslavers manumitted enslaved people for a variety of reasons, but manumission always reinforced the power of enslavers over enslaved people precisely because enslavers chose this option. Manumission carried with it a sense of benevolence that also served the enslaver's interests. The promise of manumission may have encouraged enslaved people to remain with their enslavers rather than run away or rebel; this promise of manumission may have eased the trauma of sexual violence against enslaved women in the expectation that they could be freed if they gave birth to their enslaver's child; manumitting an old enslaved person may have been couched in terms of benevolence, but it also limited the enslaver's responsibilities to the freed person as that person's capacity to work diminished. Unless they moved away, manumitted people likely retained some dependency vis-à-vis their former enslavers.

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The abolition of slavery was a result of a state decree and most often the result of a long and contested struggle to end slavery. Although always a state decree, the mechanisms of abolition and the conditions established differed considerably. British abolition in its crown colonies involved a mandated period of apprenticeship as a transition from slavery to freedom, although individual enslavers and enslaved people could negotiate shorter periods. In other regions of the British empire, abolition involved a state decree, but often framed to provide an even longer gradual end to slavery. Enslaved people were not freed, but those born after a certain date were no longer considered enslaved, and new enslavement was prohibited. The meanings of freedom, however, were constrained in some parts of the empire by the coinciding British policy of importing indentured laborers [Northrup 1995] [Connolly 2024]. Except for minors, French abolition of 1848 did not mandate a period of apprenticeship but applied abolition only to physical spaces considered French soil, leaving considerable latitude to colonial governors to define these borders [Klein 1998] [Getz 2004] [Duke Bryant 2021] [Moitt 2024]. In those colonial regions considered protectorates, French abolition was indirect: in French West Africa, the French abolished the legal category of slave (“delegalization”) in 1903, thus preventing enslavers from using colonial courts to control enslaved people, and in 1905 prohibited new enslavement. In Portuguese Africa, a royal decree in 1854 declared Portugal's intention to emancipate enslaved people in its empire, although gradually. The first stage required enslavers to register enslaved people, and failure to do so rendered them into *libertos* (free person), who still had to work for their enslavers. Additional decrees over the next twenty years changed the legal status of enslaved people and *libertos*, but as Daniel Domingues and Edward Alpers argue, “that for most individuals ... there was

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apparently little difference between what they had experienced as slaves” [da Silva and Alpers 2021] [Cooper, Holt, and Scott 2000].

As part of the broader global (but largely British) effort to end the slave trade, European nations after the Napoleonic Wars entered treaties allowing the search and seizure of ships carrying enslaved people. Already in 1808, the British had established a Royal Navy West Africa Squadron to patrol the coast in order to put teeth into the 1807 Parliamentary Act to Abolish the Slave Trade. Seized slave ships were directed to the courts of the Vice Admiralty and later to Mixed Commission Courts, which adjudicated the case. If the evidence proved prohibited activities, the ship was seized and sold, and the enslaved people liberated. Many of the liberated Africans found themselves in apprenticeship conditions for varying periods of time [Martinez 2012] [Bethell 1966] [Pearson 2016] [Chadha and Lovejoy n.d.] [Anderson 2020]. By far the largest and best analyzed of these registers was kept at Freetown, Sierra Leone. The Freetown register of liberated Africans contains selected details from 81,745 Africans landed in Freetown from 1808 to 1863 [Anderson 2020] [Misevich 2019]. It is important to remember that through their actions on the seas and in courts, Europeans liberated the enslaved Africans referred to as “Liberated Africans”.

Through the fourth path, enslaved people sought their own freedom through self-purchase, through the courts, or by fleeing to spaces where slavery was outlawed. Free or freed people who were falsely enslaved had recourse to courts if they knew how to access these courts and had the evidence necessary to prove their status [Candido 2016]. Some societies provided enslaved people with the option to liberate themselves through self-purchase, usually for a sum equivalent to the cost of a young, productive enslaved person. In 1880s Cuba, a gradual end of slavery was decreed and enslaved people found themselves in the slave-like condition of *patrocinada*, which like British apprenticeship gradually ended and placed the relationship under the scrutiny of a new institution controlled largely by enslavers and wealthy businessmen. Even though the 1880 law set the date for the formal end of enslavement, Rebecca Scott writes that “the unusual effort made by *patrocinados* to achieve their freedom through indemnification of services suggests that the act of self-purchase has a particular importance for the man or woman who could achieve it” [Scott 2000, 153–154]. The slow death for slavery in Northern Nigeria rested in part on enlarging the pathway for self-redemption by outlawing new enslavement and by declaring all children born to enslaved mothers freed as of 1 March 1901 [Lovejoy and Hogendorn 1993]. Even in post-slavery societies, where slavery is no longer a legally recognized institution, some formerly enslaved people chose to redeem themselves because this act imparted a new level of respectability. Elisabeth McMahon reminds us that in Islamic societies, former enslaved people “had the possibility for social mobility, but their ability to attain respectability likewise left them vulnerable...” [McMahon 2013]. Formerly enslaved people on Pemba, an island off the East African coast, invested in *heshima*, which was an expansive term that referred to respectability and honor, but within the established idiom of the standards of pious behavior and deportment established by the Arab elite [McMahon 2013, 6–7]. Ann McDougall recounts how an elderly former enslaved person in Senegal denigrated “colonial freedom” under which all he needed to do was to request a certificate of liberty from a colonial official. Instead, he insisted on buying his freedom from his enslaver because this act would “wipe away all his sins, past and present”. McDougall argues that it was not the price of self-redemption that made the formerly enslaved person free, but the act of pilgrimage. And only legally free people could make the *hajj* [McDougall 2007, 174–175]. Self-purchase was thus a step towards becoming free and respectable. In her ethnographic research in central Mali, Lotte Pelckmans also found that formerly enslaved people continued to negotiate their self-purchase from their former enslavers even though they were legally free because they wanted both the respectability from this act and because this act allowed them to make the pilgrimage [Pelckmans 2011, ch. 5].

Enslaved people who wanted to leave their enslavers had many different options; the most common was simply to leave. Risks abounded for those who sought to leave their enslavers. The enslavers could try to hunt them down and force their return; enslavers could confiscate children and goods that the enslaved people possessed; and those who left faced real dangers of hunger. We have bits and pieces of records of those who left, particularly after 1899 and especially after 1905 [Klein 1998] [Roberts 2005] [Rodet 2010].

The enslaved people in the Senegal Liberation Registers actively sought what French colonial officials offered them: certificates of liberty. The enslaved people in the wider Senegal-Mali-Mauritanian region who walked to French colonial officials thus shared with those who engaged with self-purchase an intention to end their enslavement. Whether through

self-purchase or by walking towards French colonial officials, these individuals engaged in purposeful actions with specific goals to have their new status recognized within their communities, by their former enslavers, and/or by governmental officials. These enslaved people wanted their names and their new status inscribed in certificates of liberty and in the Registers of Slave Liberation. They wanted or at least they accepted that to signify their new status, they needed to do so publicly. Their decision to seek their liberation meant that they needed and wanted public recognition of their new status.

Enslaved people seeking their liberation from French colonial officials sometimes used names strategically. On 13 December 1897, Fatou Sane, aged 25, presented herself and her three children before the French colonial officer at Louga, Senegal. Fatou Sane indicated that she was born in Kajoor to Sallé Niang and Penda Diop. Fatou's surname, Sane, was neither her father's nor mother's, which suggests that her surname may have been her enslaver's. Fatou Sane traveled to Louga with her three children: Seinabou Badiou, aged 6, N'Doube Gaye, aged 8, and Mamdou Badiou, aged 2. All three children were born in the village of N'Dawa in Kajoor. What is most intriguing about this request for liberation is that Fatou Sane did not indicate the name or names of the father of her children. Fatou is recorded as the mother of all three children, and all three children were remanded into her custody upon their registration as liberated slaves. It could be that Fatou did not know the names of her children's father or fathers. Or perhaps Fatou consciously avoided naming the names of her children's father or fathers because she did not want them to reclaim the children. What we can take from this single entry is a hint that enslaved people seeking their liberation from French colonial officials through the Senegal Liberation Registers used names — their own and their children's — consciously and with intentionality.

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NOM PRÉNOM	DATE DE LA LIBÉRATION	NOM PROFESSEUR ET DEMEUR	NOM ET AGE DE L'ENFANT	AGE	NOM ET AGE DE LA MÈRE	NOM, PROFESSION ET DEMEUR DES PARENTS L'ENFANT A ÉTÉ LIBÉRÉ	SIGNATURE DES DÉCLARANTS PERSONNES EN PRÉSENCE ET CHIEF DU SERVICE JUDICIAIRE
880	1897 6	Procureur Général	Germaine Koutou née à Siakhan Kabil	55	Korono Koutou et sa M. Basso		
881	"	Police Louga	Saincha Dié née à Medine	25	" et sa "		
882	"	Président Tribunal Dakar	Yelly Koutou née à Kambou (Rivières du Sud)	30	Kory Koutou et sa Yanké		
883	13 12	Police Louga	Fatou Sane née à Mamar (Cayor)	25	Sellé Mary et sa Penda Dié		
884	"	"	Seinabou Badiou née à M. Basso (Cayor)	6	Fatou et sa Fatou Sane	à la mère	
885	"	"	N'Doube Gaye née à M. Basso (Cayor)	8	" et sa Fatou Sane	à la mère	
886	"	"	Mamdou Badiou né à M. Basso (Cayor)	2	" et sa Fatou Sane	à la mère	
887	"	"	Oumal Baly né à M. Basso (Cayor)	10	M. Basso Sane et sa M. Basso	M. Planter Commis S. Sane	

## Ethical Guidelines and Politics of Naming the Names of Enslaved People

Robust and clearly articulated ethical guidelines are critical for scholars engaged in research involving enslaved people or their descendants, particularly when that research takes place under conditions of inequality. This is because thoughtless research practices can easily reproduce the erasures and violence of enslavement, including experiences such as rupture from natal homes and families as well as the social violence of being renamed, often several times. Enslaved people across the world have struggled against these processes of deracination and erasure, in part by

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building anew kinship and communities [Mintz and Price 1992] [Hawthorne 2010]. However, such experiences meant different things to different populations of formerly enslaved people. For example, when in 2020 Fredrick Miller purchased a “handsome” house not far from where he was born in Gretna, Virginia, he did not realize that he was also buying a historic plantation among whose former enslaved residents were his own ancestors. Miller and members of his family used the purchase of the plantation, Sharswood, to conduct genealogical research, only to discover that the 1860 census did not list enslaved people by name, only by age and gender. Only by digging deeper into the Virginia Slave Births Index did the Miller family find direct links to an enslaved boy named Samuel born in 1864. At the time when Samuel was born the plantation was owned by Charles Edwin Miller and Nathaniel Crenshaw Miller, who gave their surnames to baby Samuel. Only now, the Miller family “is reclaiming its past” [Heim 2022a].

Through various mechanisms of renaming, formerly enslaved people were “rendered without history”. Descendants of formerly enslaved people, especially in the diaspora, turned to well-established means of genealogical research to trace their ancestors, while others have gravitated to newer methods of DNA research to find out their ancestral origins [Sweet 2022]. For this group, recovering their “names” and their origins are important and humanizing. For other descendants of enslaved ancestors in other parts of the world, recovering the names of their enslaved ancestors may not be welcomed, especially when they chose to live close to their former enslavers [Klein 1998] [El Hamel 2013] [Becker 2021]. Although a “public secret” of an enslaved past may be widely known, as Alice Bellagamba’s elderly Gambian informants argue, “not all should be said” [Bellagamba 2012, 39–40]. So how do historians working with evidence of the enslaved past navigate these ethical and political cross currents?

We have identified three different but overlapping ethical and legal frameworks to help us think about whether to name the formerly enslaved people in our historical record. The first is drawn from ethical guidelines embedded in the rules governing research on human subjects in US federal grants. Universities and research institutes receiving federal funds must establish Institutional Review Boards charged with assessing research using human subjects. Drawing on the ethical standards for research on human subjects, we need to be concerned with 1) the obligation to do no harm; 2) informed consent; and 3) preferences for anonymity. “To do no harm” is directly correlated with “to do good” or “to provide beneficence”. What does this mean in the case of naming names? Where the stigma of slave descent persists, then naming names may do harm. On the other hand, where the stigma of slave descent persists, opening up public conversations through public history and teaching modules about enslavement, slavery, and cultural hierarchies may well undermine such stigma and promote greater equality in society (see Baldé et al. and Duke Bryant in this special issue). In Senegal and Mali, high school curriculum deal with the export slave trade but do not engage robustly with slavery and the slave trade in Africa and thus with the legacies of slavery (see Baldé et al.). The principle of informed consent is predicated upon providing human subjects with sufficient knowledge and understanding of our projects to make considered and informed decisions regarding their participation. It is based also on the principle of agentive participation. We cannot, however, ask this question of our subjects recorded in the Registers of Slave Liberations because they are long dead. But we could, following Ana Lucia Araujo, ask permission of the descendants of the liberated enslaved people if we could locate them [Araujo 2021] [Johnson 2018, 71]. However, given the incomplete nature of colonial registers and censuses in the middle- and late-nineteenth century and the paucity of civil registers of births and deaths in Africa even to this day, such a task may be impossible.

Secondly, since the Registers of Slave Liberations are official French colonial documents that name names, the regulations closest to these documents may be those governing access to court cases. The Senegalese National Archives generally follow the regulations governing access to documents held by the French National Archives. The regulations that come closest to the “legal” character of the registers of liberation are “documents relating to cases before the courts, subject to the special provisions relating to judgements and the execution of court decisions”, which remain closed to the public for 75 years following the most recent document in the file or 25 years following the death of the individual concerned in the case. In the case of a minor, the files remain closed for 100 years following the most recent document or 25 years after the death of the person concerned. The Registers of Slave Liberation may also fall under the provision of civil status birth and marriage registers, which are communicable “from the time they are closed” [Republic of France 2021]. None of these regulations would prohibit access to the Registers of Slave Liberations or naming the names of the enslaved people recorded since the last liberation was recorded in 1903.

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The third framework for the ethical use of personal information comes from the US Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996, better known as HIPAA. The HIPAA privacy rule was designed to protect individuals' medical records and individually identifiable health information. While HIPAA is not directly germane to the issue of naming names, it may be helpful by broadening out the guidance on protection of individually identifiable information, which would then include basic demographic information contained in the registers. In particular, HIPAA privacy extends 50 years beyond the death of the individual, demonstrating a realization that divulging private information can remain harmful even after death. HIPAA actually takes into consideration the privacy interests of the surviving relatives "with the needs for archivists, biographers, historians, and others to access old or ancient records on deceased individuals for historical purposes". Thus, even during the 50-year protection period, the personal representative of the decedent has the authority to lift these restrictions [U.S. Department of Health and Human Services 2013]. HIPAA's consideration of relatives is logical in a medical context, as many diseases have genetic components, and it is unlike many other privacy frameworks in this regard. Even though the SLP does not incorporate medical information, HIPAA's framework for long term protection of anonymity offers an important lesson for other kinds of information that impact relatives and descendants, including the enslaved status of ancestors. This makes it helpful for our project. 46

From a purely legal or regulatory perspective, these three ethical frameworks do not prohibit the release of personal information regarding those people who sought their liberation in Senegal from 1857 to 1903. Nonetheless, the ethical issues of naming names remains and the ethical considerations of publishing the names of liberated Africans bears special charge for the historical and sociological reasons enumerated earlier in this article. From an anthropological perspective and within the context of dealing with living informants, Lotte Pelckmans reflects on these issues, especially regarding those who changed their names: 47

Finally, there is an ethical dimension that impedes in-depth research and presentation of the data on these issues. Ethically, it is difficult to ask informants discussing name changers to get in touch with those described, since this would be considered a kind of betrayal.... [W]riting and publishing about this group is an ethical dilemma for me and other researchers. As a researcher, I do not want to violate their right to remain invisible [Pelckmans 2017, 277].

While some descendants of enslaved people would prefer to remain forgotten, others struggle against persistent discrimination and the enduring silence regarding the history of enslavement in Senegal and West Africa more generally through political movements and legal suits [Rodet 2013, 27–29] [Bales 2007] [Hahonou and Pelckmans 2011] [Pelckmans 2020].

## Conclusion

In our efforts to use digital humanities to promote social justice and to stimulate wider discussions about the legacies of slavery in order to challenge enduring stigma of an enslaved past and an unequal present, we must be mindful of the politics and ethics of naming the names of enslaved people. But we also must proceed. Enslaved people who actively sought to change their status through the courts, by self-purchase, or by walking to colonial officials to secure certificates of liberty should be recognized for the often-heroic efforts they took to secure their liberation. These enslaved people's actions therefore raise another principle to the ethical consideration of naming names: those enslaved people who actively sought their liberation wanted their new status to be public. The agency of enslaved people in seeking pathways to freedom should therefore be considered when determining whether to name names. 48

As befitting any humanistic research project, the core problem of what is to be discovered and analyzed changes as we get deeper into the project and understand better what the issues are and how to resolve them. This has been the case with the Senegal Liberations Project. At the beginning of the project, we wanted to respect the widely cited stigma associated with enslaved descent. But as we developed the project more fully and entered more data, new questions arose, as did new concerns about the harm we may be doing to the nature of our sources (enslaved people who actively sought their liberation). As a result, we adjusted our data entry practices to include names. Including names in our public-facing data and website allows the descendant community the possibility of tracing their ancestors. Including names also promotes the partial reconstruction of individual lives during a time when other kinds of historical records 49

are not available for these purposes. Finally, including names provides human faces to the much-needed political engagement in Senegal and West Africa more widely, emphasizing the need to confront inequalities and social hierarchies inherited from the era of slavery and persisting into the present (see Rodet in this collection).

In so doing, we follow Araujo and Johnson in providing a means for the descendants of enslaved people to find out more about their ancestors. As we go forward with our project and produce a French-version of our website so that those in French West Africa can engage and utilize the data we are presenting, we will need to create a system to solicit feedback from descendants as to whether the posting of the names of their enslaved ancestors is desirable in our public-facing, online project. If not, we could provide anonymity or use a pseudonym on our website. While our Senegalese academic colleagues do not believe that this is necessary, we want to establish an option whereby descendants can request that we disguise the names of their enslaved ancestors. Exactly how to do so remains to be explored (see Hopper in this collection), especially if descendants of enslaved ancestors have differing opinions regarding naming names publicly. This option may fulfill the promise of doing no harm, but it also changes the historical record as presented in this public humanities project. The solution to this issue raises even more political, ethical, and epistemological issues that we must continue to confront.

## Notes

[1] The “rope of slavery” has also become a metaphor for colonial and postcolonial elite oppression in the People’s Progressive Party in The Gambia [Bellagamba 2009, 69]

[2] Philip Misevich argues that the names recorded in the ledgers of the liberated enslaved people in Havana were reliable. He writes, “Prior to their liberation, the Africans were asked to provide information about themselves that was recorded by colonial officials in ledger books. Each page of these books was divided into seven columns and each ‘recaptive’ was given one line on the page. The details recorded by the officials included a unique identity number, name, sex (man, woman, girl, or boy), age, height, and a description of any distinctive body markings. In the case of the Sierra Leone and Havana courts, where the large majority of vessels were tried, an additional column for ‘Country of Origin’ was included, although the Sierra Leone officials eventually discontinued this practice. In addition, the registers clearly indicate that this information was provided through an African translator who was previously freed by the courts, and who came from the same region as the slaves on board the vessel under adjudication, thus partially mitigating the normally severe linguistic barriers that existed between European officials and African captives. To my knowledge, the registers represent the earliest extant list of indigenous African names” [Misevich 2008].

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