Runaway Slaves in Saint-Domingue:

Origins and Destinations

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***Abstract***

This senior thesis examines a large sample of prison lists, which report the entry of captured runaway slaves throughout Saint-Domingue, from the 18th century newspaper *Les Affiches Américaines* in order to illuminate various aspects of the slave trade and the slave population in the colony – including African ethnicity, gender ratios, the relationship of punishment to marronage, and intent on returning from marronage. From these newspaper documents, a database of 13,337 records was created from seven full years from the 1760s and 1780s (with some additional samples), where each record pertains to an individual mention of a captured runaway or other slave and their relevant data. This included at a minimum, the name, race, ethnicity, *nouveau* status, age, prison entry date, and prison and arrest location. More detailed data extraction was completed for 1766-1768, noting the slave’s height, brands, chains, owner’s name, and whether they refused or could not answer questions. From this period, an additional 3,790 records were collected about owners, relatives, and businesses mentioned in the lists. Alongside this data collection, contemporary colonial sources were used to locate historic administrative boundaries and place names to recreate the historical geography of Saint-Domingue using GIS software. By linking the arrest and prison locations of the slaves in the database with the geolocation in the software, spatial analysis on the movement and distribution of the prisoners was completed. The conclusions drawn point out interesting characteristics of marronage in the time period and offer possible directions for future research of marronage in Saint-Domingue. The results are also published on a website (<http://yacara15.github.io/>), where supplementary materials are available – including copies of the database, shapefiles, field descriptions, graphics created from the data, and this essay.

***Introduction***

The Atlantic Slave Trade is arguably the most destructive episode the world has ever seen. Its history is marked by violence and oppression, and which left a painful and deep-rooted legacy throughout the Americas. The Haitian nation, in particular, has experienced one of the region’s most tumultuous histories. The French colony of Saint-Domingue was once the jewel of the French crown, producing vast quantities of agricultural goods as the most profitable colony in its possession – all provided by slave labor. The story of these slaves and their eventual nation of Haiti were largely forgotten by outsiders in the midst of racism and political and societal failures, but these slaves and their stories should not be rendered invisible.[[1]](#footnote-1) Their lives, recorded in documents around the world, can provide vital data about the structure of the slave society of Saint-Domingue. Examining them in an organized manner can reveal the patterns in the slave trade, in the practice of slavery as an institution, and in the individual lives and networks of the slaves themselves.

In this study, the slave prison lists of Saint-Domingue, which were published weekly in the colony’s newspaper, *Les Affiches Américaines*, were databased and analyzed to provide insight into the demographics of the slave population and the spatial distribution of the colony’s runaways. The lists contain a small but consistent number of attributes and details that allow for a surprising multitude of ways to examine Saint-Domingue as both a space and a population. Previous scholars have done excellent work showing the richness and usefulness of runaway documentation to the study of the slave trade and slave societies, but a systematic and comprehensive collection and analysis has yet to be attained.[[2]](#footnote-2)

Previous presentation of such documents has been most often in the form of a few select examples, with the remainder of the collection dismissed or deemed not rich or unique enough to be discussed. This is because documents are spread all around the world, from Louisiana to Senegal to Brazil, in multiple languages with multiple legal and social traditions that keep records unstandardized and unexamined. Because of the sheer enormity of the numbers and the diversity of sources, geographic places, economic conditions, and government traditions, data presented about the slave trade has been mostly aggregated or anecdotal outside of the United States, at least until recently. [[3]](#footnote-3)

Historians of the Atlantic Slave Trade era have only in recent years become involved in using databases and other digital methods to advance their scholarship, with the notable early exceptions of Gwendolyn Midlo Hall’s *Louisiana Slave Database* and David Eltis’s *Atlantic Slave Trade Voyages Database*. All these historians have been attempting to reconstruct the lives of the millions of slaves torn from their homeland by looking at previously unseen records or those that have not been systematically studied yet. They have shown that it is possible to use records to point to the life and culture of these slaves, creating a full-bodied picture of their social networks, resistance, and daily life.

Even though documents on African slaves may be sparsely detailed or scattered around the world, those historians have proven that when the documents are brought together and seen as a whole, conclusions can be drawn which were previously unapparent. This has been the goal here. Using data provided in the sources on ethnic affiliation, brands, scars, age, gender, time, and location, the people and places of Saint-Domingue emerge. Though the men and women in the documents acted and were reported mainly as individuals, they were also members of their separate African cultures and their newly forming colonial society. By compiling these small bits of information, it becomes clearer how those slaves who resisted and pushed the limits of their captivity were able to form connections with other people, make use of the space around them, adapt to their new environment, and continuously and repeatedly respond to their situation.

***Background***

The research conducted here made use of three colonial sources from Saint-Domingue. First was the colonial newspaper, *Les Affiches Américaines*, which published the runaway advertisements and prison lists from where the slaves’ data was collected. The others were M.L.E. Moreau de Saint-Méry’s works: his *Loix et Constitutions* volumes listing and describing the laws of the colony, and his *Description de Saint-Domingue* series, which contains incredibly detailed descriptions of the colony from a variety of perspectives. For the purposes here, however, Moreau de Saint-Méry’s *Description* was mainly examined for historical geographic purposes. As the newspaper is the most important source used here, its history and form is discussed below.

*Les Affiches Américaines* was the colony’s only major newspaper throughout its run from January 1766 to December 1790. Its predecessor, entitled *Gazette de Saint-Domingue*, was authored by Sr. Monceaux in Cap-Français in early 1764, but only ran until August. Within three weeks, however, the printer Antoine Marie began publishing *Les Affiches Américaines*. The royal patent he had received that winter gave him the exclusive rights to print and sell in the colony.[[4]](#footnote-4) Although the paper usually had several small news pieces on Europe and the Americas, the majority of the publication consisted of shipping and trade information from the colony’s ports, advertisements, death notices, and letters from colonists around the island. Marie’s “American Notices” may have been more of a local bulletin than a full newspaper, but eight pages were printed twice every week (with later years publishing supplementary sections), and colonial administrators often used it as a way to spread information around the colony, making it quite useful for historians today.

Several sections of *Les Affiches Américaines* were actually required by administrative order. For example, deaths of important individuals and colonists’ departures for France were required to be placed in the paper. The most important, at least for purposes here, is the requirement for the paper’s printer to include a list of all *nègres en marronage* who had entered the prison that week. In February of 1764, the Intendant of Saint-Domingue, René Magon, wrote a letter instructing each jurisdiction to require their jailers every week to submit a list of the *Negres Marrons* that had entered the jail. Though this order was for the *Gazette de Saint-Domingue*, the requirement held for *Les Affiches Américaines* when it succeeded the *Gazette*. Slave owners had found previous lists so helpful that Magon felt it was necessary to continue their publication. [[5]](#footnote-5)

With that order, the prison lists became a standard feature of Saint-Domingue newspapers. Every issue, the *Nègres en Marronage* section reported descriptions of each slave brought to the *prisons épaves* around the colony since the last reporting. The 1764 order required the name, nation, brand, and age to be published. This allowed the owner to recognize his or her slave.[[6]](#footnote-6) These prisons were located throughout the colony. In the north were those of Cap-Français, Fort-Dauphin, and Port-de-Paix. The western part had the prisons of Saint-Marc, Port-au-Prince, Léogane, and Jacmel. And those in the southern part of the colony were located in Saint-Louis, Cayes, and Jérémie. Prisons did exist wherever the police or maréchausée were established, but slaves were usually transferred from the small parish prisons to ones in the larger towns. A few of the early lists from the 1760s indicate such transfers in *Les Affiches Américaines*.[[7]](#footnote-7)

The prison lists, because of their required publication, offer a more complete picture of marronage in the colony than runaway advertisements. Saint-Domingue is often described as having two types of marronage: *grand* and *petit*. The first was what traditionally comes to mind when envisioning a runaway slave. These men and women have left for good, with no intention of returning – their goal is to blend into the free population or to flee the jurisdiction entirely (Spanish Santo Domingo was a common destination). *Petit* marronage, on the other hand, is more temporary. These slaves may only desire to disappear for a few days or a week, seeking a respite from their labors and then returning.[[8]](#footnote-8) The runaway advertisements, because of the cost, usually only contain instances of *grand* marronage where the slave has been gone a significant period of time, or *petit* marronagefrom owners who live near the place of publication. The prison lists, however, contain every slave who is captured suspected of marronage, meaning both *grand* and *petit* maroons are included regardless of where their owner lives or how long they have been gone, from a few hours to several years.

This is not to say that every slave *en marronage* is included in the prison lists. Some were never caught, and either passed for free, left the colony, or returned of their own volition to their masters. Others were caught very close to their owners’ homes, and brought immediately back by neighbors or police forces. And even once placed in the prison, slaves might have been reclaimed so quickly that they were not reported in the following week’s paper. There is really no way to tell exactly how many slaves participated in marronage at this time, but Jason Daniels has indicated it may be possible with a thorough examination of colonial plantation records cross-examined with prison lists and runaway advertisements. But despite all this, the prison lists currently give the best approximation of marronagenumbers. [[9]](#footnote-9)

The reality is that not every slave *en marronage* was imprisoned or caught, which requires a discussion about how the slaves that did end up in these prisons came to be there. To begin with, the most common reason for imprisonment for slaves was due to marronage.[[10]](#footnote-10) Specific sections of the colony’s jails were set aside for this purpose, and they were called *les prisons épaves*. The term *épave* refers to lost or unclaimed property, which captured runaways were until returned to their masters. As unclaimed property, they were still valuable to their owners, who wanted to reclaim them and get them back to work as soon as possible. The colonial administration therefore provided a service to slave owners by employing police to patrol the colony for slaves *en marronage* and bring them to the prisons to be reclaimed.

***Police Forces of Saint-Domingue***

The internal security forces of Saint-Domingue were divided between urban and rural. The term *police* referred to the troops in the colony’s towns, while *maréchausée* was used for those serving in the rural areas. In the towns, the police force consisted of a small number of Inspectors dependent on the community’s size, with an exempt and several sergeants and officers below him. Their main tasks were to patrol the streets, prevent theft and fraud, and keep the peace. The laws outlining their orders pay particular attention to checking the quality of meat at the butcheries, which had to be examined every morning, and to assure the orderliness of market days.[[11]](#footnote-11) But most of all, they were instructed by the colony’s Intendants and Councils to be constantly on the lookout for slaves who were not where they were supposed to be or who were doing something they were not supposed to do.

The second internal force was the *maréchausée*, or the rural police. They were named after a similar force in France whose members were dedicated to protecting rural estates from bandits and chasing down deserters. Stewart King notes, however, that the duties of the Saint-Domingue *maréchausée* were again largely focused on the pursuit of runaways and the enforcement of slave law. They had focused on breaking up maroon bands and settlements early in the colony’s history, but these had all but disappeared by the time of *Les Affiches Américaines*. The *maréchausée* were almost solely comprised of men of African descent – with the exception of the top-ranking officials – which allowed for a unique armed class within the *gens de couleur.*[[12]](#footnote-12) Together, the police and *maréchausée* of Saint-Domingue were probably the most common arrestors of slaves *en marronage*.[[13]](#footnote-13)

Because the most important tasks for the police forces were to enforce the slave laws, it is important to discuss what types of violations they watched for while on duty. Knowing the laws and regulations for slaves, particularly as they refer to marronage, allows greater understanding of the type of people who were imprisoned in the *prisons épaves*. Slaves’ behavior was very restrictive, especially outside his or her owner’s property. No slave was to be out past 10 o’clock in the evening without his master – and any slave without a lantern at night was immediately brought to the prisons because the act automatically indicated a desire for deceit. Slaves away from their masters for any reason were to carry with them at all times a *billet*, which was a document signed by their master stating his or her permission for the slave to be travelling or working away from the master’s property. These *billets* could be demanded from the slave by any white colonist and were only allowed to give the slave leave to gone for a week and no more.[[14]](#footnote-14) Many other regulations existed, but these are the ones of most interest as their violations resulted in imprisonment as a maroon.

Once brought to the prison, the *Receveur des Épaves* recorded the slave’s information. He wrote in the *Registre du Greffe* the incoming slave’s name, nation, brand, age, *signalement* (identifying features or description), and owner’s name. He was also to turn over a proper and complete report of this information each week to the printer of *Les Affiches Américaines* and send it to the local parish to be posted on the door. If he did not do so or was not careful to record good information, and the slave was sold at public auction as unclaimed property and the owner complained, the *Receveur* was to be held personally liable for the cost of the slave to the previous owner.[[15]](#footnote-15) This provided a good incentive to follow the law to the letter, meaning that the prison lists of *Les Affiches Américaines* are always published, with hardly a single issue going without it.

***African Ethnicity and Gender***

A key aspect that these documents address is slave ethnicity. Hall, along with several others, has written and shown that vital information about the slave trade and the lives of slaves are tied to their identity as members of African nations. This view is opposed to a long-held view that origins in Africa cannot be determined or did not matter, which Hall argues is dehumanizing and simply wrong.[[16]](#footnote-16) The documents from *Les* *Affiches Américaines* are very rich in their inclusion of African ethnicities, which appear to have been often provided by the slaves themselves. These ethnicities show the part of Africa from which the slaves of Saint-Domingue came from, their affiliations with others of the same ethnicity, and patterns of shipment and purchases made by slave traders and owners. The slave trade, and the social networks of the slaves, can be better understood as a result.

Of the more than 12,000 individual slaves in the prison lists, about 10,200 of them are identified by their “nation.” The consistency of this detail being in the newspaper is again due to the Council’s orders. Only 784 prisoners are unattached to a nation without explanation, such as if the slave was *nouveau* or if he or she refused to give an answer to the question. The result for scholars is a rich collection of ethonyms used by the French and the slaves themselves. Gwendolyn Midlo Hall has pointed out that French documents often have the most detailed list of African ethnicities, with an exception perhaps being the Cuban Emancipados registers.[[17]](#footnote-17) Controversy and debate exist, of course, over what the term “nation” meant to the Africans being asked, and how both Europeans and Africans separated ethnicity from language. But without being able to speak confidently about the changing, evolving ethnicities and politics of 18th century West and Central Africa, I will limit the discussion to what the sources on the American side of the Atlantic say, allowing those with more expertise to attempt that puzzle in the future.

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| Table 1.1 | Male | Female | Unknown | Total | Percent of Total (12,029) |
| Créole  *(born in Americas)* | 1,607  84.1% | 304  15.9% | 1  .01% | 1,912 | 15.9% |
| Congo | 3,625  89.3% | 404  10.0% | 30  .01% | 4,059 | 33.7% |
| Nago | 453  77.8% | 120  20.6% | 9  1.5% | 582 | 4.8% |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Mondongue | 310  90.0% | 32  9.3% | 3  .01% | 345 | 2.9% |
| Ibo | 276  83.4% | 53  16.0% | 2  .01% | 331 | 2.8% |
| Bambara | 245  87.2% | 34  12.1% | 2  .01% | 281 | 2.3% |
| Total  (Not Just the Above) | 10,360  86.1% | 1,523  12.7% | 146  .01% | 7,510 | 62.4% |

Table 1.1 contains a breakdown of all prisoners of creole origin (born in the Americas), along with that of the five most populous ethnic designations from the sample. The percent of total column may seem low considering these are the largest ethnic groups, but that is simply because 15.0% of all prisoners were not reported as having an ethnic designation. Table 1.2 provides a more specific look at gender in maroon slaves by year. The earlier period of the 1760s are compared with the 1780s. While the largest ethnic groups shift somewhat, they remain largely the same, with the notable exception of Mozambique. The number of Senegambian slaves (Bambara, Mandingue, Sénégalais) is replaced with that from Mozambique, as more slaves are brought from southeastern Africa while the Senegambian slave trade declines throughout the 1780s.[[18]](#footnote-18)

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Table 1.2 | 1766 | 1767 | 1768[[19]](#footnote-19) | 1785 | 1788 | 1790 |
| Créole  Male  Female | 113  80.5%  19.5% | 161  80.1%  20.0% | 122  84.4%  15.6% | 260  86.5%  13.4% | 346  83.5%  16.8% | 298  85.6%  14.4% |
| Congo  Male  Female | 252  90.5%  9.5% | 291  88.3%  11.7% | 231  88.3%  11.7% | 562  86.8%  11.6% | 686  89.2 %  10.6% | 744  89.4%  9.1% |
| Nago  Male  Female | 30  66.7%  33.3% | 35  62.9%  37.1% | 23  78.3%  21.7% | 59  76.3%  17.0% | 109  78.9%  21.1% | 99  70.1%  27.2% |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Mondongue  Male  Female | 17  88.2%  11.8% | 21  76.2%  23.8% | 29  93.1%  6.9% | 42  90.5%  10.5% | 58  84.5%  13.8% | 60  90.0%  6.7% |
| Ibo  Male  Female | 6  100%  -- | 27  85.2%  14.8% | 18  72.2%  27.8% | 46  76.1%  21.7% | 54  77.8%  22.2% | 64  92.2%  7.8% |
| Bambara  Male  Female | 16  87.5%  12.5% | 32  87.5%  12.5% | 22  86.4%  13.6% | 34  83.4%  14.7% | 44  93.2%  .07% | 52  96.2%  3.8% |
| Mozambique  Male  Female | 0  --  -- | 0  --  -- | 0  --  -- | 11  100%  -- | 32  84.4%  15.6% | 146  91.1%  7.5% |
| Total  (Not Just for Above) | 675  84.0%  15.1% | 846  84.2%  15.5% | 661  84.9%  15.0% | 1,583  85.3%  13.3% | 2,111  87.1%  12.5% | 2,256  87.7%  11.3% |

The Congos were the largest of the ethnic groups to enter the prisons, but this is unsurprising due to their massive numbers throughout the colony. They account for one-third of the entire sample, and that is even when including those slaves without nations in the documents, which if eliminated from the total here, would drive the percentage of Congo even higher. The proportion of Congolese in the prisons actually decreases over time, despite the increasing number of West Africans coming to the Americas.[[20]](#footnote-20)

Another aspect that can be analyzed using the data from the prison lists is gender. Most striking about the numbers in terms of gender is the fact that 86.1% of all maroon prisoners were male. This number is slightly higher than that of Jason Daniel’s (by ~2%), but this is likely explained by the selection of different sample years and his inclusion of runaway advertisements.[[21]](#footnote-21) Both percentages, however, are significantly higher proportions of males than that of the overall population in Saint-Domingue according to David Geggus’s calculations. Geggus states that over the period of 1719-1794, slave ships to the French colonies were about 65% male.[[22]](#footnote-22) Even when breaking gender down further by year, as seen in Table 1.2, females are still participating in marronage far less than the general population statistics of the colony. It is unclear exactly why this is so, as women were not necessary less exposed to the usual causes for marronage – in fact, French records have shown that at least among the recorded cases of abuse, women were treated far worse than males.[[23]](#footnote-23)

Two ethnic groups do have a greater proportion of females *en marronage*, however. Creole women and Nago women consistently take part in marronage more than average for females, particularly the Nago. The larger proportion of creole women is understandable because of the natural sex ratio, which helps correct the imbalance the between males and females that exists from the slave trade. The Nago women’s reasons, however, are more unclear. The ethnic breakdown for Saint-Domingue is difficult to attain beyond coastal regions, so it is hard to ascertain whether the Nago were simply more evenly proportioned in terms of gender or if it relates to a more cultural reason.

Overall, the numbers show that males were much more likely to participate in marronage. The proportions of each ethnic designation, however, generally match the patterns of the slave trade. It is difficult to obtain accurate breakdowns of African ethnicity, as most studies report aggregates from shipping records and therefore list the coast of departure rather than the actual ethnic origin. A more comprehensive study of records in Saint-Domingue needs to be attempted in order to gain a more accurate picture of African origins in the colonies. The prison lists provide a good entryway and show that the information is being recorded, but it is just a cross section of the population and cannot be used to analyze the entirety of the colony.

***Punishment***

The prison lists and advertisements offer insight into the reasons for marronage, and from that, the treatment of slaves in Saint-Domingue. Two main explanations of marronage are put forth by Gabriel Debien: bad treatment (corporal punishment, cruelty, rape) of slaves, usually by the manager rather than the owner, and a lack of food or decent living conditions.[[24]](#footnote-24) While the newspapers do not often explicitly mention reasons for escape, some ads and prison lists provide information that give evidence to support these reasons for marronage. Many slaves have indications of multiple punishments, and sometimes even fresh wounds will be described. Other slaves are described as emaciated, or are mentioned as being sick. These all point to why the slaves might have ran away from their owner’s property. Because of this, the role of punishment in marronageis looked at in detail here.

In the lists and ads examined, 101 slaves *en marronage* had indications of punishment. Noting this attribute, however, was only done in the secondary data collection, and so only covers the 3,206 slaves from advertisements and prison lists from 1766-1768. Though this number does not include the later 1780s period, it is surprisingly low (~3%) given that physical punishment was not an extraordinary occurrence in Saint-Domingue.[[25]](#footnote-25) But even though physical brutality was commonplace in the colony, jailers were not required to note every scar and bruise. As discussed previously, the descriptive requirements were limited to identifying features, not general descriptions. The jail officials followed these requirements quite accurately, and so the newspaper only reported instances of severe or rare punishment, or those punishments which were designed to be signifiers of certain behavior to other colonists and to the owner.

The types of punishments that are mentioned in the ads and prison lists are terribly cruel. They are profound examples of the brutal force that colonists felt was necessary to control and subdue the majority slave population. Of the 101identified, 13 have marks or scars from a whip, 15 have severed ears (10 with both missing and 5 with only one missing), 1 whose hamstring has been severed, 1 whose head has contusions from being beat with a baton, 1 with a broken arm, 3 with a fleur-de-lis mark, and 73 who have escaped or were imprisoned with some sort of iron chain, collar, or weight. Jacques, a Saint-Domingue creole owned by a free *mulâtresse* baker in Cap-Français, was brought to the Fort-Dauphin prison with a scarred back, an iron collar, and no ears, showing that many of these unfortunate men and women bore several of these markers simultaneously. [[26]](#footnote-26) A whipping or beating might be followed up with chains to restrict movement and ostracize the slave as a trouble maker.

That these punishments were the result of troublesome or rebellious behavior is largely the reason why *Les Affiches Américaines* bothered to publish these descriptions. Jailers and registry officials wanted to locate owners quickly to avoid fines and collect fees. To do so, they were to provide identifying descriptors to supplement the name, age, brand, and owner. They sent information about corporal punishment and iron chains to the newspaper because those markers indicated the past behavior of the slave, making the slave easier to identify. The Code Noir dictated that a runaway slave who has been recaptured “shall have his ears cut off and shall be branded with a fleur de lys on one shoulder.” If he flees again, “he shall have his hamstring cut and be branded with a fleur de lys on the other shoulder.”[[27]](#footnote-27) Therefore, slave owners reading that a slave has a fleur-de-lis or cut-off ears, even if the slave refuses to cooperate, can still identify the prisoner based off that information and the brand. In addition, any slave who has run off with a *nabot* (iron weight) or chain around his ankle has already been noted as a “problem” slave by his owner, and thus will be more quickly identified – both by anyone who sees him off his plantation and when mentioned in the prison lists. The rarity with which the Code Noir punishments seem to have been meted out, at least based off the documents in *Les Affiches Américaines* from this time period, also means that any runaway appearing with evidence of them will be very quickly identified.

Also important to note about punishments of slaves, is that the relative rarity of these punitive actions in the prison lists and ads is evidence of Gabriel Debien’s position that slave owners in Saint-Domingue were more practical in their infliction of punishment than what the law dictated. Debien also points out that the mandated punishments were often ignored for *nouveau* slaves, and this is supported in the prison lists.[[28]](#footnote-28) Only two of the slaves with punishment markers were *nouveau*. Both had iron collars around their necks and could not even name their masters, indicating that their collars might be from their slave ship or auction and not in fact evidence of punishment for an infraction. Inflicting permanent physical punishment on newly arrived slaves did more harm than good for slave owners.

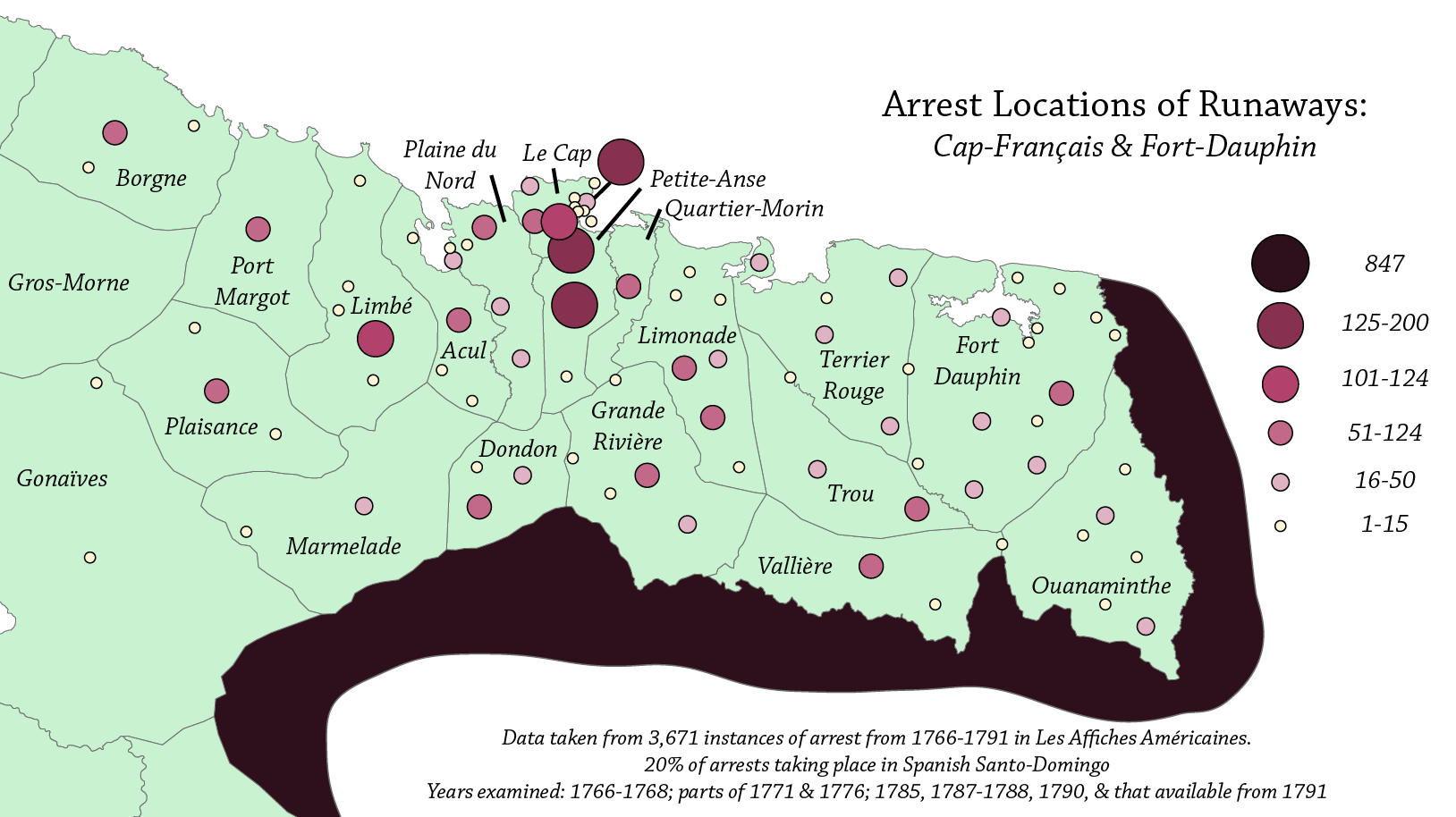
Further, Debien states that the Code Noir mandated punishments were not followed even for repeat offenders.[[29]](#footnote-29) And this is the case for Florentine, a Mina slave who ran away in 1766 and 1767. She is wearing a collar and chain the first time she is imprisoned in the spring of 1766, but after slipping away during the Christmas season the following winter and being caught again, there is no indication of severed ears or the fleur-de-lis. This may be explained, however, by the fact that she does not seem to have left Cap-Français or to have been gone for very long. And even la Fortune, who left his master Michel Taris, a carpenter in Cap-Français, three different times over a year and an half, does not appear to have received any permanent punishment. The third time he does have a *nabot* around his ankle, but that seems to be the extent of his restrictions. His carpentry skill probably deterred Taris from selling or permanently maiming him. Plantation slaves, however, were not so lucky.

Though the sample is small, it is worth noting that none of the slaves with the Code Noir punishments are noted to have a skill or to have belonged to an urban owner. The data is not significant enough to make any sure conclusion, but it fits with the argument that slaves on the plantations received more ill-treatment and were dealt with more harshly due to their continual replacement.[[30]](#footnote-30) Debien’s conclusion that the most severe corporal punishments were not usually implemented seem to be supported by the prison lists and ads in *Les Affiches Américaines*, though a more complete collection of punishment data through the 1770s and 1780s will solidify this argument. It would be particularly interesting to see if the indications of Code Noir punishments decrease over time, or if they increase as the population of African slaves in the colony increases.

***Spatial Distribution***

One of the most interesting ways in which to analyze the maroons of Saint-Domingue is to see how they are moving throughout the colony. The laws discussed earlier make it clear that slaves were not to have any sort of freedom of movement, yet the slaves *en marronage* travel the roads, visit relatives, and seek new lives. Tracing their movements can provide insight into what sort of options slaves had to resist their captivity and how they traversed their environment.

Some slaves captured and taken to the prisons were simply shirking work and planning on being gone for a few days. But others were intent on escaping enslavement for good. Using the arrest locations from the prison lists, an estimate can be reached as to how many slaves were attempting the latter goal. Figure 1.1 shows the various locations of arrests for those entering the Cap-Français and Fort-Dauphin prisons throughout the sample period (though most come from the 1780s). The reason the whole colony is not shown is because the southern and western jurisdictions did not report arrest locations in the newspaper. The arrests are focused in two areas: Spanish Santo Domingo and the large city of Cap-Français.

 Figure 1.1

Approximately 20% of all arrests (3,671) took place in Spanish territory. This is a significant proportion and is the most obvious indicator of those slaves who had no intention of ever returning to Saint-Domingue and their masters. Santo Domingo was a desirable location for slaves of Saint-Domingue because there was more open land and less people – the population density was about 6.5 times higher on the French side of Hispaniola and was much less cultivated.[[31]](#footnote-31) This meant that fugitive slaves would have a better chance to start a new life undetected.

The French administrators were unhappy with this reality, however, and attempted to better reclaim their fugitive property “who have passed and pass daily into the Spanish Part” [[32]](#footnote-32) by offering extensive rewards. In April of 1776, the French struck a deal with the Spanish regarding the return of runaways. For every French maroon returned to a French prison from Santo-Domingo, 200 livres would be paid regardless of age, sex, or distance travelled. This permanent bounty was in addition to the smaller reward that was based on distance and number of people and horses involved in order to ensure as many returns of French runaways as possible.[[33]](#footnote-33)

The other main region for arrests was the area around Cap-Français. The four locations of the city, la Fossette (the site of slave auctions), Haut-du-Cap (the town just south of the city), and the parish of Petite-Anse (the central section of the Plaine du Nord south of the city) made up another 17% of arrests. The intentions of the slaves captured here are more ambiguous, as some may have been planning to blend into the city for good, others may simply have been visiting for the day, and still more might have been *nouveaux* slaves running at the first opportunity from the harbor or the auctions – making easy targets for police. Only 36 of those 620 arrested slaves were reported as *nouveaux*, however, which limits the viability of the last option. But the size and population of the city (nearly 19,000 in 1789) still makes it difficult to read their intentions. The pull of the city’s entertainments, large free colored population, and the anonymity that it offered would have been very attractive to plantation slaves laboring in the Northern Plain.[[34]](#footnote-34)

An analysis of arrest locations from the prison lists offers an estimation of how many slaves were intent on *grand* marronage and speaks to the tension between the French and Spanish colonies sharing the island. Slaves seem to have headed in one of two major directions when *en marronage*. Many made for the mountains in the south side of the Northern Part. They would then make their way across the border into Spanish Santo Domingo. The other major trend was to escape to the city to hide among the crowds of slaves and free people of color. It is not certain just from location what each slave’s intention was, but greater knowledge of where the slave’s owner was located would help create a more accurate picture. The prison lists from the 1780s which have arrest locations are less likely to report the owner’s location, however, meaning that it would involve extensive research and examination of records to locate them all.

***Analytic Conclusions***

The prison lists contain an incredible wealth of information for being merely condensed one-line entries. Many other topics could have been touched upon here, but ethnicity, gender, punishment (causes for marronage), and spatial movement are some of the more interesting. A few of these topics have been talked about quite frequently, as in the case of punishment and physical abuse. But others have only rarely been discussed in the literature, such as ethnic analysis beyond shipping records and detailed examination into the colony’s geospatial features. The prison lists and runaway advertisements are rich documents, but they are only a subsection of the population and the data here is only a sample. There is still much to learned about Saint-Domingue, particularly in uniting various types of sources and records. Hopefully technology and digitalization will help in that process.

***Methodology***

The information that makes up each entry about the *nègres marrons* is quite minimal in terms of content, but it is consistent, numerous, and standardized. These properties lend themselves rather well to quantifiable analysis. This may seem a strange method for historians to promote because it implies “unfeeling” and “emotionless” statistics, in contrast to the usual view of historians as those who bring the past to life. But historians must work with what they have. And the sources that mention the actual slave participants of the Atlantic Slave Trade only rarely include rich narratives, diaries, and documents. Of course there are exceptions, but the majority of the sources are lists, inventories, manifests, and registers that provide minimal descriptions at best, at least when compared to what historians would like to know.

A major reason for this is the dehumanizing nature of slavery. Slaves were viewed as inhuman capital investments, and so the materials that historians usually have to work with *are in fact* unfeeling and emotionless. Therefore, the task set before those who study these documents is to reveal the human being behind the reward value and the brand, the narrative behind the ethonym or ship itinerary, or the motivation and intent behind their resistance.

To uncover this knowledge and the changing patterns — and so move towards a more complete understanding of the society and time period — historians must become translators. They have to take the dehumanizing data from their sources and turn it back into the narrative of the peoples who were removed from their homes and forced to labor in the homes and fields of foreign strangers. Databases help accomplish this. Information that may seem too daunting and unintelligible because of its repetitiveness or volume, and thus too difficult to analyze using traditional pencil-and-paper methods, is much more easily accessible and understandable with a computer. A well-designed database allows the pattern to surface from amid the abundance of *Jean-Pierres*, *Nègres Congos*, and *Nègres* *nouveaux*. It assists in forming a more knowledgeable analysis that can be shared to reduce the work and continually reexamined as scholarship changes.

The nature of the sources about the Atlantic Slave Trade has meant that many documents have been left unexamined in favor of richer, more descriptive ones. With regards to the specific subject and place of this study — marronage in Saint-Domingue — researchers of the past had to resort to tally counts or make estimations based off a limited time period that resulted in erroneous conclusions that are only now being corrected.[[35]](#footnote-35) Undoubtedly other regions have experienced similar historiographies.

While the database described below is not complete nor is it a comprehensive examination of all *nègres en marronage* from Saint-Domingue, it does offer a glimpse at an incredibly interesting sub-section of the population while also showing what is possible for historians to accomplish using technology. It is by no means a dismissal of “traditional” historical scholarship, as the database would be worthless without understanding the historic context for the sources, which includes the laws supporting the prison infrastructure and the colony’s geography. Only with this background can the collected data mean anything. A database is more than a tool, because it reveals what the researcher often cannot see alone, but it is not everything. It is more like an ideal partner — someone who helps make sense of a difficult problem and then steps back, allowing all the credit to go to you.

The database created for this project is split into two components: the primary historical data from the newspaper sources and the historical geography data gleaned from Moreau de Saint-Méry and historical maps. When the two components are combined, the complete database allows for geospatial analysis of the runaways of Saint-Domingue. This section will outline the design process of the fields, the data coding, and the GIS implementation. Not wanting to be particularly technical, specific problems and interesting results will be highlighted in favor of a lengthy discussion about relational databases, queries, and programming.[[36]](#footnote-36)

A database is not ideal for every type of source material, and so the first step was to determine what type of information I had and how to best represent it. For example, those who work with runaway slave advertisements, such as Jean-Pierre La Glaunec and Douglas Chambers, have chosen to present each ad as a single text object, without any other analysis or deconstruction.[[37]](#footnote-37) The advertisements are small narratives and often contain unstandardized information, making it challenging to decide what to code and what to dismiss as being too problematic. Ed Baptist, in his work on South Carolina runaways, has noted that ads will record height in a multitude of different ways (5’10”, between 5 and 6 feet, 62 inches, five feet and some inches), complicating what would seem to be a very simple attribute.[[38]](#footnote-38) The prison lists that I worked with, however, consistently contained the exact same types of information and were regularly published because the jailers and printers were required to by law.[[39]](#footnote-39)

To begin with, the database had to be designed in a way so it would be tailored to the primary sources. Of course, basic data must always be collected, such as name, ethnicity, race, and gender in order to compare the data to other collections. But beyond those few basic fields, the choice is largely up to the researcher. In my case, I wanted to choose fields that would allow me to answer the research questions I had for the prison lists of *Les Affiches Américaines*. Because I was particularly interested in African ethnicity, punishment and its role in marronage, and spatial movement by maroons, I focused my fields on those aspects of the sources.

Beginning from Gwendolyn Midlo Hall and Paul Lachance’s fields design, I added or adapted several of my own. I made sure to include a record of whether or not the slave was *nouveau*, and I came up with a several fields for recording African ethnicity and creole origin. Recording the latter two as is during the data collection stage, I also wanted to be sure to have a way to standardize those entries for later analysis. And for the punishment data, I added a field for a description of chains, collars, and shackles – with another field to record whether or not there was indication of punishment. To keep track of the spatial aspect, I recorded the prison locations and arrest locations for every prison list that contained that data. I entered the locations as written in the document. It was the process of sorting out this geographic data which took the most time and effort aside from the actual data collection.

It seems a simple task to record locations and then plot them on a map, but I was unprepared for Haitian maps. Haiti’s place names were changed quite drastically after the Revolution in the late 18th, early 19th century in order to match the country’s new beginning. Cities and towns were renamed and administrative districts remapped. The colonial border had also changed significantly. In addition to this, the country of Haiti is not well-mapped. The most vigorous mapping efforts have been in the aftermath of the 2010 earthquake for humanitarian purposes. Not that this wasn’t important, but the most common commercial mapping engines in the United States, such as Google Maps, has certainly not made Haiti a priority. The open source mapping site, Open Street Map, has done a better job, but the task still remained for me to manually locate most of the locations mentioned in the prison lists.

The process of geolocating historic places is called geoparsing. It involves a lot of time spent with primary source – in my case over 100 historic maps, Moreau de Saint-Méry’s *Description de Saint-Domingue* volumes, and satellite imagery. Luckily, the internet provided all of these sources digitally. I created georeferenced shapefiles and vector files using QGIS, an open source Geographic Information Systems software. I located the historic boundaries of each parish based on my sources and puzzled out where the cantons and mountains were located, usually based off indirect references.

In addition to locating the arrest locations, I wanted to see if it was possible to geolocate even more specific places. I took a beautiful plat map of *le Plaine du Cap*, drawn by René Philipeau in 1786, and overlay it on top of road and satellite imagery in QGIS (a process called georeferencing). I was then able to trace the boundaries of each plantation, giving me the exact location. Though I ended up only being able to match a small number of slaves and owners in my database with the plantations from the map, I think further effort in this area would allow for great research. David Geggus has pointed out that certain African ethnicities were more likely to be on coffee plantations rather than sugar plantations, and vice versa. Others have also suggested that a comprehensive cross-referencing of plantation records, maps, and administrative documents would be the best way to obtain more detailed knowledge about Saint-Domingue.[[40]](#footnote-40) Knowing where plantations were, what they grew, and which slaves lived there would provide a new perspective on the colony and in greater detail than ever before.

Records are often scattered and disconnected from each other, and stitching them back together is part of the historian’s task. Mapping and databasing allow for researchers to have a way to organize and store those records and contemporary sources to make the process easier. It is my hope that databases and GIS software help historians in the future to see in greater detail and with more accuracy.

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5. Ibid., viii, 706. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Ibid., 706. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. This type of prisoner transfer is mentioned for 35 slaves in *Les Affiches Américaines*, all from the lists of the 1760s. Those transferred to Cap-Français included 23 from Fort-Dauphin and 1 from Port-de-Paix. Those transferred to Port-au-Prince included 3 from Mirebalais, 3 from Jacmel, 3 from Léogane, and 2 from Arcahaye. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
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9. Daniels, 124. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
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13. The reason this cannot be said for certain is because the registers which recorded the name of those who brought the slave to the prison were either destroyed, lost, or possibly still unexamined, as I have never seen reference to them anywhere in the scholarship. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Dubois, loc. 696, Kindle edition; Moreau de Saint-Méry, *Loix et Constitutions*, Vol. 5, 226-228. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Ibid., 90. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
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17. Hall, 34-35. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
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33. Ibid., 687. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
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35. Daniels, 124-126. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
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37. See Le Glaunec and Robichaud’s website or data sources of Douglas Chambers. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
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