



Michael Dickinson

Research Status Update

Diversity Graduate Student Research Grant

With the assistance of the Center for the Study of Diversity, I was able to conduct archival research crucial to the completion of my dissertation. I traveled to Barbados and Jamaica over the course of five weeks in order to consult primary source material necessary for my project now titled "Surviving Slavery: Oppression and Social Rebirth in the Urban British Atlantic, 1680-1807." The project investigates kinship and community ties enslaved blacks forged in Bridgetown, Kingston, and Philadelphia in order to survive dehumanizing oppression. As the title suggests, archival research has led me to envision slavery as a system comprised of oppression and social rebirth: two conflicting and complementary concepts critical to for the institution to function.

At the Barbados Department of Archives, I searched through the St. Michael's Parish Vestry Minutes, which report the events and issues addressed by the parish council. This source is important because Bridgetown was part of St. Michael's Parish; therefore the minutes provide some insight into the role of blacks in the city and provides important context. The archive's collection of inventories also proved crucial. The inventory records were lists of "property" appraised after someone was deceased. Among the inventories were lists of slaves held by recently deceased slaveholders, which estimate the value of the slaves. The documents also listed the occupation of the enslaved person as well as kinship ties among slaves in the household. In addition, the archive held corresponding wills, which shed light onto how the slaves were separated and the potential of manumission once the slaveholder passed away. At the Bridgetown Public Library, I was able to collect photographs of runaway slave advertisements in Bridgetown newspapers unavailable in the United States.

In Jamaica, I examined similar records as in Barbados including Kingston Parish Minutes, wills, and slaveholder inventories held at the Jamaica Department of Archives. Similarly, I dedicated time at the Jamaican National Library researching runaway slave advertisements in Jamaican newspapers. The runaway slave advertisements shed light onto trends in slave escape, enslaved black access to information, and the role of black captives in concealing runaways. The research trip was extremely beneficial to both my dissertation and my development as a scholar. I was able to familiarize myself with the holdings at the aforementioned archives in Barbados and Jamaica. This was significant because the facilities do not have databases available online. Moreover, the trip provided valuable experience conducting research abroad, interacting with archival staff in foreign archives, and networking with fellow scholars.

Finally, I have spent considerable time at archives in Pennsylvania, including the Library Company of Philadelphia and the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, where I was able to

purchase a membership with Diversity Research Grant funds. I consulted the aforementioned archives to examine slaveholder correspondence, slave narratives, probate records, and the minutes of the Pennsylvania Abolition Society. Together these sources combined with a range of other bodies of textual evidence helped illuminate the actions and challenges of enslaved families and communities. Currently, I am working to write dissertation chapters analyzing the lived experiences of urban slaves while continuing to examine materials in Philadelphia. Last spring, I presented my research progress to faculty and fellow graduate students in the History Department. Furthermore, I recently gave a research talk at the Association for the Study of African American Life and History (ASALH) Centennial Conference in September. The talk was based on a completed dissertation chapter and was titled, "Systematic Oppression and Social Control: Examining the Constraints of Slavery in the Eighteenth Century Urban British Atlantic." I am also scheduled to present additional research findings this spring as part of the Mellon Scholars Program at the Library Company of Philadelphia. In addition, I am in the process of editing articles for submission to both the *Journal of Urban History* and the *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*. I thank the Center for the Study of Diversity for helping to fund my research thereby aiding in both my dissertation progress and my scholarly growth.



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