



In the Name of Freedom: A Corpus Linguistic Analysis of Personal Names Recorded in Fugitive Slave Advertisements Published in New York and New Jersey 18th Century Newspapers¹

I. M. Nick

Germanic Society for Forensic Linguistics, Flensburg, GERMANY

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Abstract

The ubiquitous image of the sprawling 19th century Southern plantation has meant that much of the research on US slave names has focused on regions below the mid-Atlantic (Desrochers 2002). The resulting lack of attention that has been given to other times and spaces has necessarily limited our collective understanding of slave naming patterns. The purpose of the current investigation is to help address this geo-temporal oversight. With that goal in mind, the present empirical study explores the naming patterns of fugitive slaves as advertised in newspapers published in New York and New Jersey between 1730 and 1790. Using the techniques of corpus linguistics, this investigation analyzed 147 runaway slave advertisements featuring 150 slave names. These onomastic exemplars comprised four name-types: first names, surnames, nicknames, and aliases. Onomastic patterns were identified using descriptive statistics as well chi-squared and Fisher’s exact tests. Special attention was paid to exploring the relationship between the runaways’ names and their reported age, gender, and racial classification. After a brief introduction to slavery in the New England colonies, this study presents the empirical results and compares them with previous findings on US slave names. The paper concludes with a discussion of the limitations and argues for more corpus-based research into slave names.

Keywords: fugitive slaves, personal names, US Revolutionary War, corpus linguistics, New York, New Jersey

Introduction: Slavery in the Northern States

In 1790, the first official census was conducted of all US residents, excluding untaxed Native Americans. The enumerations were taken by federal marshals across the 15 participating colonies or “districts”. At the end of the survey, it was revealed that the nation was home to nearly 4 million inhabitants (Wright 1900, 17). The impetus for the Census was not only to provide reliable information about the total population size of the fledgling nation. It was also designed to enumerate one particularly contentious population segment: the enslaved. As shown below in Table 1, already by 1750, a clear demographic pattern had emerged. The overwhelming majority of residents with African parentage were located in the South (i.e., Georgia, Maryland, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Virginia). By comparison, in the north (i.e., Connecticut, Delaware, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, and Rhode Island) the African(-American) population was approximately only a little over one-sixth that size.

Table 1. Estimated Population Classified as “White” and “Negro” in the Thirteen US American Colonies in 1750 (adapted from Franklin and Moss 1988, 61)

Southern Colonies			Northern Colonies		
Colony	White	Negro	Colony	White	Negro
Georgia	4,200	1,000	Connecticut	108,270	3,010
Maryland	97,623	43,450	Delaware	27,208	1,496
North Carolina	53,184	19,800	Massachusetts	183,925	4,075
South Carolina	25,000	39,000	New Hampshire	26,955	550
Virginia	129,581	101,452	New Jersey	66,039	5,354
			New York	65,682	11,014
			Pennsylvania	116,794	2,872
			Rhode Island	29,879	3,347
Totals	309,588	204,702		624,752	31,720

Of the 31,720 northern residents who were classified as “Negro”, 16,368 or 51.60% were registered as living in New York and New Jersey. The two also ranked first and second for the total number of Negro residents in the northern colonies and fifth and sixth amongst all thirteen.

The fact is, although both states are celebrated today as fiery centers for the Abolitionist Movement, both New York and New Jersey were heavily invested in the sale, trade, rental, and distribution of foreign and domestic-born slaves. Alongside this human trafficking, their colonial economies also relied heavily upon slave labor for processing and shipping agricultural goods grown in the plantation South (e.g., rice, tobacco, and cotton) as well as maintaining goods and services within the states. From domestic servants and

farmhands in small rural communities, to miners, wood cutters, artisans, and dock-workers in the regions' burgeoning urban centers, slave laborers were an integral part of the socio-economic systems of New York and New Jersey (Hodges 1999; Taylor 2001).

To safeguard this precious revenue, New Jersey legislators successively introduced laws designed to protect and promote the slave industry (Hodges 1997). For example, to attract slave-traders to its ports, New Jersey progressively eliminated official tariffs and duties on slave imports. This de-regulation helped to stimulate both legal and illegal slave-trading in the region (Hodges 1999). In addition, by the 18th century, the New Jersey legislature had ruled that any master wishing to manumit a slave must first agree to post a £200 bond or pay an annual fee of £20 to cover the slave's maintenance. The rationale offered for this exorbitant financial condition was that experience had shown "that Free Negroes are an idle, slothful People, and prove very often a charge to the place where they are" (Allinson 1776, 20). As Russell (1997) explains, this edict ostensibly made voluntarily emancipation impossible for all but the most wealthy and determined slave owner. It should come as no surprise then that between 1774 and 1783, only one slave was reportedly set free in the state of New Jersey (Reiss 2006, 88). In 1782, the state assembly ruled that slaves who dared to free themselves would be given at least thirty-nine lashes of a whip on their bare back (van Buskirk 1998, 81).

The Garden State was by no means alone in its legal maneuvering to protect its economic investments in the traffic of human chattel. Thanks to its pro slave-trade laws, by the 18th century, New York City housed one of the nation's largest US slave market industries (Franklin and Moss 1988). In fact, the first recorded person to flee the country was an enslaved man from Albany, New York who sought refuge in Canada in 1705 (Chadwick 1999). Within a decade of that fugitive's escape, the state had become home to one of the nation's largest, most influential, icons for international trade—Wall Street. On the December 13, 1711, New York's Common Council passed legislation designating "Wall Street" as the city's official slave market (Singer 2014). In no time, the market had become one of the city's biggest trade hubs where New Yorkers travelled each week to purchase fresh supplies of enslaved Africans and West Indians from the nearby wharves (Russell 1997). By 1741, this bustling trade meant that one-fifth of the city's population was comprised of African(-American)s and one-third of the municipal workforce was made up of slaves (Farrow, Lang, and Frank 2005). Despite growing concerns that the state's increasing reliance on this peculiar institution constituted an incalculable threat to the residents' physical and moral safety, the seduction of profit proved all too great for most lawmakers. Between 1700 and 1774 alone, over 7,000 slaves were imported to the state of New York, "most of them destined for sale to surrounding rural areas" (Foner 2015, 29). Thus, for all their outward moral compunction, New York and New Jersey not only tolerated, but also energetically participated in and profited from the enslavement of millions of men, women, and children (Farrow, Lang, and Frank 2005).

The hypocrisy of this participation became all too evident as Northern white patriots increasingly demanded their freedom from the tyranny of the British Crown while continuing to pass legislation designed to keep a significant portion of their fellow residents in chains indefinitely. Already in 1706, the New York legislature had passed an act which declared that "all and every Negro, Indian, Mulatto, and Mustee Bastard Child and Children who is, are and shallbe [sic] born of any Negro, Indian, Mulatto, or Mustee, shall follow ye State and Condition of the Mother [...] and adjudged a Slave" (Higginbotham 1978, 128). In essence, this legislation made slavery a condition of birth, in perpetuity (Higginbotham 1978, 128). The irony of such legislation at a time when cries for liberty abounded did not go unobserved in the United Kingdom. As the legendary English lexicographer Dr. Samuel Johnson acerbically quipped in Great Britain: "How is it that we hear the loudest yelps for liberty among the drivers of negroes?" (Hugh 1997, 465). In the colonies, the hypocrisy was also not lost amongst those crying for revolution. In 1774, Abigail Adams, the second first Lady of the United States, made a similar observation. In a private letter to her husband, she wrote: "it always appeared a most iniquitous scheme to me to fight ourselves for what we are daily robbing and plundering from those who have as good a right to freedom as we have" (Higginbotham 1978, 88). Despite such criticisms, by the dawn of the War of Independence, New York and New Jersey had introduced some of the severest anti-slave codes in the nation (Olsen 1944; Higginbotham 1978). For example, by 1751, both legislatures had already passed laws prohibiting the assembly of five or more African-Americans (be they free or enslaved) (Hodges 1999). The meaning of an "assembly" was quite broadly defined and could be applied to such gatherings as public holidays, sporting events, church gatherings, and funerals. Rather than silence calls for liberty, these prohibitions simply stoked the fires of dissent. The reaction of the New York and New Jersey lawmakers was the introduction of increasingly draconian punishments where slaves found guilty of rebellion were to be publicly executed by being beaten, whipped, hung by the neck, broken at the wheel, or burned alive at the stake (Finkelman 2006). Originally envisaged as decreasing the probability of slave insurrection, these punitive slave codes succeeded only in strengthening the natural resolve to be free.

It is no accident then that between the years 1775 and 1783 the number of runaway slaves was four times higher than it had been for the seventy years previous, making the Revolutionary Period "the largest black escape in the history of North American slavery" (Hodges 1999, 159). As Harding observes: "As the patriot slave traders and [...] slaveholders moved to break their colonial bonds to the English Crown, the captive Africans also moved [...] in growing daily defections" (41). The dramatic increase in freedom-seeking fugitives

is evident in the proliferation of newspaper advertisements calling for their return. Importantly, although the southern colonies had a much larger slave population, the Northern newspapers reported far more runaway slaves. Between the 1730s and 1750s, for example, New England newspapers “reported nearly twice as many runaways” as their southern counterparts; and between 1700 and 1789, “over 800 runaway slave notices would appear in New England newspapers.” (Bly 2012b, 7).

Slave Advertisements

Slave advertisements in colonial newspapers can be divided into three functional sub-types: 1) commercial advertisements by slave-trading companies (e.g., the Royal African Company) for the sale, rental, or trade of enslaved peoples; 2) official announcements by law enforcement agencies regarding the appearance, apprehension, imprisonment, punishment, and/or execution of individuals suspected of being fugitive slaves; and 3) public advertisements by private citizens for the recovery, punishment, and/or murder of missing and/or “absconded” slaves. While all three sub-types vary in format and overall design, the information they provide is fairly consistent. As a general rule, these documents contain the following demographic information about the runaways: their age; gender; racial classification; clothing; previous and current owners; unusual, distinguishing physical features (e.g., missing teeth, amputated limbs, brandmarks, scars); and psychological/behavioral characteristics (e.g., language(s) spoken, literacy, special skills, and training). An example of a private citizen’s public advertisement that features this information is displayed below:

Figure 1. 18th Century Runaway Slave Advertisement from the New York Gazette

<i>The New-York Gazette</i>	September 13, 1764
<p>Run-away on Monday the 27th of last Month, August, from Gilbert Smith, of Upper Freehold, in Monmouth County, East-New Jersey, a Slave, named Jacob, but has several Times changed his Name, calling himself James Stuart, and James Pratt, &c. his Mother was a Negro and his Father an Indian, but he passes himself for an Indian, and is like one, of a yellowish Tawney colour, is about 23 years of age, 5 feet 4 or 5 inches high; his Hair cut short on his Crown, but curls around his neck; has a remarkable Scar on one of his Cheekbones, occasioned by a Scald or a Burn, and speaks good English. He is much addicted to Smoking and Drinking. [...] Any person that will bring the said Run-away to Mr. John Talman in New York, Butcher, [...] or commit him to any public goal will receive from either of them, Forty Shillings reward, and all reasonable charges.</p> <p>Gilbert Smith.</p> <p>N.B: All Masters of Vessels are forbidden to harbor or conceal or carry him off as they will answer it at their peril.</p>	

Adapted from Hodges and Brown (1994, 122). This advertisement was not included in the corpus used for this study. Emphasis added by author.

As illustrated in Figure 1 above, whenever possible, slaveowners provided detailed onomastic information about runaway slaves. Great pains were taken, for example, to indicate not only fugitives' official or "proper" names (i.e., names that had been formally assigned to and registered by the owner); but also, any unofficial names or nicknames that may have been informally used amongst fellow slaves (Cohen 1952; Costa 2001). In not a few cases, these in-group monikers were reportedly taken from an African language or inspired by an African naming tradition such as bestowing children the names of seasons, months, or days of their birth (*Quash, Cuffe, Abba, Juba; January, Monday, Spring, and Easter*) (Mencken 1937; Paustian 1978; Kerrigan 1996). Other sources of inspiration for slaves' personal names that have been attested in fugitive slave advertisements include the following: toponyms (*Bristol, London, Norfolk, Boston, Glasgow*); mythological charactonyms (*Cupid, Apollo, Neptune*); theonyms and Bible-inspired names (*Abraham, Cain, Noah, Sarah, Esther, Rachel*); titulars (*Prince, Bishop, Queen*); and anthroponyms (*Caesar, Nero, Pompey, Titus*) (Puckett 1936; Mencken 1937; Eby 1961; Dunkling 1977; Inscoc 1983; Kay and Cary 1986; Black 1996; Rodriguez 2007).

Alongside information on personal names, slaveowners also frequently reported any known or suspected alternative names that might be used as aliases in hopes of thwarting fugitives' attempts to change their names and establish new lives as free persons (Meanders 1975; Schafer 1981; van Buskirk 1998; Windley 2013). Runaways reportedly used several onomastic strategies to help them meld into free African-American communities: exchanging or altering their first names (*Thom* → *Tom*; *Venus* → *Abigail*); replacing diminutives or hypocoristics with full-forms (*Billy* → *William*); exchanging stereotypical and/or demeaning monikers strongly associated with bondage with less conspicuous names (*Sukey and Sambo* → *Sarah and Samuel*); translating names to fit their new linguistic surroundings (*Beke* → *Becky*; *Henri* → *Henry*); and adopting surnames to emulate naming pattern common among free Whites and African-Americans (*Jamey* → *James Freeman*) (Greene 1944; Cohen 1952; Genovese 1974; Schafer 1981; Black 1996; Berlin 2010; Laversuch 2011; Windley 2013). Taken all together, such onomastic details were useful for positively identifying a runaway (Meaders 1975). They could also prove beneficial in establishing a slaveowner's legal claim to an apprehended fugitive in cases of disputed ownership—for example, in instances when multiple slaveholders claimed one and the same slave. According to Schafer (1981), such written records were often crucial given the fact that apprehended slaves, understandably, often refused to give law enforcement officials the names of previous slaveholders, insisting instead that they were free.

Methodology

The current investigation involved an empirical analysis of 147 slave advertisements placed in New York and New Jersey newspapers between the years 1730 and 1790. For this work, a single advertising sub-type was utilized: fugitive slave advertisement placed by private citizens. The advertisements were chosen via random selection without replacement from the Hodges and Brown (1994) compilation of 662 advertisements. After a set of texts featuring 150 names had been selected, the following onomastic information was gathered about each fugitive: 1) first name(s); 2) surname(s); 3) alias(es); and 4) nickname(s). In addition, the runaways' gender, age, racial classification (i.e., *mulatto* and *negro*) were recorded. Finally, the publication years of the advertisement were recorded.

Once this information had been collected and entered into a database, several descriptive statistical analyses were conducted for the overall set of data as well as the two different genders and racial classifications: Negro and Mulatto. The between-group and within-group incidence of name types and tokens were calculated and onomastic frequency distributions were determined for the sub-samples and the overall corpus. To determine whether statistically significant differences existed, chi-squared and Fisher Exact tests were performed.

Results

Demographic Findings

Across the entire randomly drawn sample, 85.71% (126) of the fugitives were male and 14.28% (21) were female. This means that, in this study, men previously held in bondage were six times more often reported in the advertisements than women. This finding is comparable to other investigations of fugitive slaves in New England (Olson 1944; Nash 1973; Nagle 2004; Reiss 2006). There are several possible explanations for this gender difference. It could, for example, reflect a greater interest amongst owners to recover male fugitives, for fear of being held vicariously liable for willful, malicious, or accidental damages caused by the runaways

during their absence (Finkelman 2002). In which case, the higher incidence of advertisements for male runaways might not necessarily be indicative of a greater propensity of enslaved men to run as compared to women held in bondage. However, the general consensus among historians is that enslaved women ran away far less frequently than their male counterparts. As the award-winning US history scholars John Hope Franklin and Loren Schweninger (1999) explain: “although slave women desired freedom as much as slave men [...] a smaller proportion than among men decided to run away” (212). For example, in Hodges’ (1999) study of slavery in New York and East Jersey, it was found that male runaways outnumbered females by 419 to 34. Importantly, this gender imbalance is not one that appears to be limited to fugitives recorded in the Northern states, but is to be found across the nation (Meaders 1975; van Buskirk 1998; Nash 1973; Olson 1944). There are a number of intersecting reasons why enslaved women might have been less inclined to run than men. The sheer prospect of either leaving children behind or finding a way to escape with them may have been far too daunting a prospect for many a would-be female fugitive. Added to that psychological and logistical burden were the physical dangers of life-on-the-run, to say nothing of the special punishments reserved for captured female fugitives. During the time period represented in this investigation, it must be remembered that legions of battle-worn soldiers roamed the country-side. For a woman of color on the run, apprehension by a marauding military band spelt neither automatic rescue nor immediate support.

Just the opposite might have been the case for male fugitives, however. As the war between the British and the Colonists waged, both sides attempted to gain the decisive military advantage by enticing enslaved men of color to join their ranks with promises of emancipation (Higginbotham 1978; Chadwick 1999). Such assurances would have proven irresistible to many an able-bodied man willing to take his fate into his own hands and fight for his liberty. Consequently, for thousands of African (-American) men held in bondage “the confusion, crisis, and chaos of the Revolutionary period opened an escapeway” (Harding 1993, 42).² Still, there was no guarantee for successful escape (let alone manumission); and the punishments for capture were dire to deadly. From whipping, branding, amputation, drawing and quartering, the penalties for attempting to “steal oneself away” from a slaveowner included a sadistic catalogue of legalized torture. Given such dangers, it is not surprisingly perhaps that the majority of slaves who undertook this risk were strikingly young. In the sample examined for this study, the median age group for runaways was the middle twenties, with the oldest person in the sample being 55 and the youngest 14. This finding again matches those reported in earlier studies where the prototypical runaway slave was found to be a young man in his early thirties, late twenties (Greene 1944; Meaders 1975; van Buskirk 1998; Reiss, 2006).

Another demographic skew found in this corpus pertained to the fugitives’ racial designations. Across the entire sample, 22.67% (34) of the advertisements featured a runaway who was described as being *mulatto* as opposed to *negro(e)*. The chi-square test confirmed that this difference was significant at the $p < 0.10$ [$\chi^2 = 2.71$, $p = 0.0995$]. This categorical difference has also been reported in other studies of runaway slave advertisements (Greene 1944; Meaders 1975; McManus 2001; Schafer 1981). There are many factors which might help to explain why light-skinned slaves might have been more likely to run than their darker-skinned compatriots. Mulatto slaves, for example, tended to have higher levels of literacy and specialized training than Negro slaves (Franklin and Schweninger 1999; Mitchell 2008). These advanced skills might have significantly increased their willingness to risk running away in hopes of establishing new independent lives in freedom. The perceived potential of reaching this goal might have been heightened by the fact that many White slaveowners tended to afford their Mulatto slaves more rights and privileges such as travelling without supervision or establishing side businesses for a share of the profits (Bly 2012b). With sufficient time, planning, and courage, an enslaved person could take advantage of such opportunities and assemble the documentation, financial capital, and social networks necessary for a successful escape (Windley 2013). Once on their way, the escapee could then use these resources along with their light complexion to eventually pass as a free man or woman. All that was needed was to complete the change in identity was new name.

Intra-Racial Findings

Across the entire corpus, 10.32% (12) of the Negro fugitives (NF) were listed without a personal name. By contrast, only 5.88% (2) of the advertisements placed for the Mulatto fugitives (MF) featured no personal name. A similar finding was obtained by Mäkinen (2008) whose corpus of 190 fugitive slave advertisements comprised nearly the same period of time 1730-1780. In her investigation, it was also determined that in cases where the advertiser failed to indicate the personal name, the wanted fugitives were generally Negroes who were “recent purchases” and “had not been long in the country” (41). Though striking, in the current study, the results of the Fisher Exact test did not reveal a significant difference in the incidence of “no naming” between the NFs and MFs at the $p < 0.10$ [$F = 0.7373$]. This result may be indicative of the fact that an advertisers’ failure to include onomastic details about a runaway, irrespective of the fugitives’ appearance, was equally unusual.

By comparison, a significant intra-racial difference was found in the diversity of names listed for the MF and NF sub-groups. An examination of the MF personal names revealed a comparatively high degree of

uniqueness. Among the MFs, 82.53% had names which only appeared once in the sub-grouping. This finding was in marked contrast to the NF advertisements where only a little over half (51.72%) were found to have a unique name with a frequency of 1. The chi-squared test confirmed that the MFs did indeed possess a significantly higher frequency of singularly occurring names [$\chi^2 = 12.2803$, $p = 0.0045$ at $p < 0.10$]. Amongst those MF personal names which appeared more than once, the most common was *Tom* which was listed for four different runaways (11.76%). The names *Bray*, *Charles*, and *Sam* were each recorded twice in the MF sub-sample (5.88%). For the NF sub-sample, the names with the highest frequency and within-group percentages were the following: *Jack* (10) 8.62%; *Tom* (8) 6.89%; *Frank* (6) 5.17%; *Charles* (5) 4.31%; *C(aesar)*, *Claus(e)*, and *James* (3) 2.58%; *Anthony*, *Cuff*, *Cyrus*, *Duff*, *Hector*, *Joe*, *Pamela*, *Prince*, *Robin*, *Sam*, *Sambo*, *Tone(y)*, *Will*, *William*, and *York* (2) 1.72%. Thus, for both sub-groups, the names *Charles*, *Sam*, and *Tom* were among the most frequently recorded.

In addition to this similarity, for both sub-groupings, the Bible appeared to be a popular name source. A little under a fifth (19.23%) of the MF names fell into this category: *Jacob*, *Mark*, *James*, *Peter*, and *Tom*. Within the NF sub-set, 15.85% were related to figures in the Bible: *Abraham*, *Ben*, *Hannah*, *Jacob*, *Joe*, *Sarah*, *John*, *Isaac*, *Mark*, *Moses*, *Peter*, *Tom*, and *Simon*. Of these names, the most popular by far were *Moses* and *Tom*, with frequencies of three and eight, respectively. The popularity of the Bible as a source of onomastic inspiration has also been attested in other studies on slave naming (Mencken 1948; Black 1996; Rodriguez 2007).

Aside from these similarities, several differences were also identified between the MF and NF sub-samples. For example, while three different African Day Names were found amongst the NF personal names (*Cuff*, *Quaco*, *Quash*), no such names were identified for the MFs. Similar results have also been obtained in other investigations of slave names (Jeffreys 1948; Cohen 1952; Insoce 1983; Thornton 1993; Laversuch 2005/2006). This intra-racial group difference powerfully mirrors the differing cultural orientations broadly attested between these two segments of the slave population. On the one hand, there were the “mulattos” whose names commonly manifested assimilation of European/American norms; and on the other, there were the “negro(e)s” whose names often still retained overt vestiges of African traditions.

Another culturally illustrative onomastic contrast pertained to the formation of the fugitives’ personal names: the MFs had a higher incidence of full forms as opposed to hypocoristic or shortenings. Mulatto runaways in this corpus were named *John*, *Frederick*, *William*, *Pamela* and *Elisabeth*, not *Johnny*, *Freddy*, *Will*, *Pam*, or *Beth*. By comparison, several clippings and nicknames were found in the NF sub-grouping (e.g., *Cretia*, *Fann*, *Harry*, *Jack*, *Johnsey*, *Joe*, and *Peg*). This difference, though attested in other studies (e.g., Laversuch 2006) was not found to exceed the threshold of statistical significance in this investigation.

Another intra-racial difference did, however, reach this level. While 17.65% of the MFs were listed as having had or using a surname (e.g., *Powelse*, *Lee*, *Scribers*, *Edward*, *Butler*, *Roberts*, and *German*), only 9.48% or 11 out of 116 of the NFs reportedly had or used a surname (*Francois(e)*, *Johnson*, *Jeste*, *Jennings*, *Kupperth*, *Lee*, *Minors*, *Stow*, *Smith*, and *Rouse*). The chi-squared test confirmed that the MFs were indeed described as having a surname more often than the NFs [$\chi^2 = 0.17441$, $p = 0.01866$, at $p < 0.10$]. This result is one which has also been found in other investigations of fugitive slave advertisements (Soderlund 1983; Trotter and Ledell Smith 1997).

Be that as it may, the incidence of surnames identified in this sample was higher than has been recorded in previous studies. Mencken (1948), for example, described surnaming as “extremely unusual” in his investigation of slave advertisements placed in southern newspapers from 1736 to the end of the 18th century (107). Many decades later, in their examination of advertisements for slaves held in the South, Heuman and Walvin (2003) came to a similar conclusion. According to their work, only 1 percent of the fugitives advertised in South Carolina newspapers were described as having a last name. Based on their research, the two concluded that a “distinctive pattern, forced on slaves as much as anything else, was **the absence of surnaming** [emphasis added]” (347).

In other investigations of slave advertisements, the incidence of last names appears to be higher and more in line with the findings obtained in the present study. In Greene’s 1944 examination of fugitive slave advertisements from Massachusetts, Rhode Island, New Hampshire, and Connecticut, for example, approximately 8% of the runaways were described as having a last name. In 7% of the slave sale announcements placed in New Orleans 19th newspapers, the persons described were listed as having last names (Schafer 1981). Recently, more modern corpus-based investigations have also provided compelling evidence of surnaming amongst slaves. In a study of 5,000 runaway slave notices placed in New Jersey newspapers between 1720-1781, it was revealed, for example, that almost 10% of the fugitives were recorded as having a surname (Marrin 2007). In a smaller computerized investigation of runaway slave advertisements placed in colonial newspapers between 1729 and 1818, analogous results were obtained with 11.34% of the sample displaying a surname (Laversuch 2011).

Based on these findings, the reported differences in the incidence of slave surnaming may have less to do with slaves’ overall naming practices and far more to do with slaveowners’ varying awareness of these practices. As Schafer (1981) noted, “probably there were many other slaves who used last names which were

not mentioned or not known to their owners” (50). There are two obvious reasons why slaves might have avoided using surnames in the presence of slaveowners. First and foremost, slaves who had it in mind to escape and establish a new identity elsewhere would logically have carefully guarded their future intended monikers. However, even amongst slaves who had no such plans, great caution would have been exercised to keep personal surnames secret from slaveholders. It must be remembered that in many areas, slaves were expressly prohibited from adopting last names, either by tradition or legislation as such an onomastic custom would have “diluted the concept of the slave as chattel and raised his status above that of the owner’s horses and family pets” (Jackson and McDonald 2007, 27). Given this prohibition, it is clear why “slaves hesitated using surnames with whites” lest they risk ridicule or punishment for being uppity (Gutman 1976, 236). This widespread self-censorship may have contributed to the long-held and erroneous assumption that slaves did not have surnames.

Gender Findings

A number of gendered onomastic differences were detected in the data. For example, the names recorded for female runaways (FR) demonstrated a much higher degree of individuality (or a lower overall frequency) than for male runaways (MR). Whereas several frequency clusters were identified for certain MR names (e.g., *Charles*, *Frank*, *Jack*, and *Tom*), other than the name *Pamela*, none of the FR names reached a frequency higher than three. In other words, the onomastic diversity as measured by frequency of appearance was higher for the FRs than for the MRs. This difference has been well-attested in 20th and 21st century investigations of gender, naming, and uniqueness (Allen et al. 1941; Anderson 1985; Levine and Willis 1994). Another striking gender difference identified involved the incidence of surnaming.

Although 11.33% of the MR sub-grouping featured a surname, not one single female fugitive in the corpus was recorded as having a surname. The chi-squared test confirmed that the gender difference was indeed significant [$\chi^2 = 2.71$, $p = 0.0995$, at $p < 0.10$]. This result finds ample corroboration in other investigations of slave names. In a study of 383 marriage records kept for African-American residents of Pennsylvania between the years 1709 and 1780, it was determined, for example, that only one of the enslaved women was listed as having a surname as opposed to 20% of the enslaved men (Trotter and Ledell Smith 1997). In Soderlund’s 1983 study of marriage records, manumissions, and wills kept in colonial Pennsylvania, it was also determined that “more enslaved men than women held recognized last names” (67). Historically, such findings have been routinely used as evidence that last names were comparatively rare amongst US female slaves.

However, such inferences may have been somewhat premature. The fact that female slaves’ surnames appear in written historical records less frequently does not automatically mean that they did not exist. The relative absence could, for instance, have been due to the predominately male inscribers of these historical documents being unaware of the fact that the women they were recording had surnames. Alternatively, the record-keepers of the time may simply not have seen the necessity of recording these women’s surnames, even if they had been aware of their existence.³ According to the customs of the day, female domestic servants, be they free or indentured, were commonly addressed by their first names only. For that reason, a female runaway seeking work and/or shelter under the identity of a freewoman would only have needed to alter her first name to hide her identity and legal status. Slaveowners attempting to recover a runaway female slave might therefore have felt it only necessary to report a runaway woman’s first name and any possible aliases she might assume. Where male runaways were concerned, slaveowners appear to have used a different logic.

Several of the MR advertisements made a point of cautioning readers that the fugitive in question might attempt to conceal his identity by taking on a surname. For example, in a 1734 advertisement in the *New-York Weekly Journal* for a Negro slave with the name *Johnsey*, it was noted that the fugitive might go by the name of *Jonathan Stow* (Hodges and Brown 1994). A similar warning was issued in the April 29th issue of Parker’s *New-York Gazette* from 1762. In this newspaper advertisement, readers are alerted that a Mulatto fugitive known as *Charles* might seek to conceal his identity by adding the surnames *Roberts* or *German* to his first name (Hodges and Brown 1994, 91). Strikingly, no such subterfuge involving surnames was reported in the advertisements for the women escapees. Instead, female fugitives who were believed to have taken on an alias were described as either modifying or exchanging their pre-existing first names. One example was *Ohnech*⁴, a Mulatto woman who was described in a 1758 advertisement of the *New-York Gazette*. According to the announcement placed for her return, slavecatchers might discover her travelling under the assumed name *Hannah* (Hodges and Brown 1994, 74). A similar warning was issued in a 1763 advertisement placed in *The Weekly Post-Boy* where readers were asked to keep a sharp look out for a Negro runaway named *Lucretia* who was suspected to be hiding out using her reported nickname *Cretia* (Hodges and Brown 1994, 101).

Alongside these above differences, the cross-gender comparisons also yielded two interesting similarities. First, both the MR and the FR names revealed considerable diversity in their structure. Both full forms (*Pamela*) as well as shortenings and hypocoristics were attested for both genders (e.g., *Fann*, *Jenny*,

Peg, and *Cretia*; *Harry*, *Jack*, and *Tom*). There were both names common to the European name store and others that were comparatively uncommon (e.g., *Sarah*, *Jenney*, *Nell*, *Anne* vs. *Quash*, *Cuff*, *Quaco*, *Lens*, *Ohnech*, and *Suck*⁵). There were monosyllabic names (e.g., *Lens*, *Peg*, *Sam* and *Dan*) and phrasal names (e.g., *Pleasant Queen Anne*, *Prince Dermien*, and *Malato Jack*).

The second cross-gender similarity found was the lack of overtly offensive names. From *Anthony* to *Violet*, all of the personal names recorded in the advertisements were found to be neutral to positive for the period of time. This finding is in contrast to other investigations which have recorded a plethora of unquestionably pejorative names for enslaved men and women (Puckett 1973).⁶ Again, the fact that this nomenclature was not recorded does not mean that it did not exist. It may well have been that given the public and formal nature of the newspaper text-type, slaveowners refrained from recording any pejorative names or nicknames that they may have used for the runaway slaves. The absence of dysphemistic names may also be indicative of regional differences in the system of slavery instituted in the North and the South, or simply a sampling artefact.

Discussion and Conclusion

As with any study, this investigation has certain methodological limitations. Chief among them was the comparatively small sample size. Had a larger set of slave advertisements been employed, it would have been possible to examine a larger number of (para)linguistic and demographic variables. In addition, the investigatory restriction to one specific sub-type of slave advertisements limited the volume and complexity of the information that could be extracted. If different documents types had been used (e.g., fugitive slave advertisements, church records, ship manifests, and autobiographical writings of such period eyewitnesses as former slaves and slavers), it might have been possible to make more inferences about the origin of the personal names identified.⁷ Such triangularization can also help to overcome some of the inherent biases which might have been introduced by the evidentiary material examined. In the case of fugitive slave advertisements, for example, it is important to remember that the authors were slaveowners with a limited and biased view of the oppressed people they depicted. This does not mean to say that documents produced by slaveowners are wholly inaccurate. However, when using such one-sided material, it is important to exercise caution when drawing conclusions.

Despite these limitations, the results of the present investigation have successfully provided quantitative corroboration for intragroup variations in the fugitives' names and naming patterns. Furthermore, this study has helped to highlight the benefits of applying corpus-based linguistic approaches to the investigation of historical onomastic data. As Motschenbacher (2020) stresses, the techniques and "the instruments that corpus linguistics offers have the potential to substantially improve our knowledge about how names are actually used" (13). With the steadily increasing number and availability of digitalized historical records, onomasticians find themselves in an excellent position to avail themselves of corpus and computational methods to systematically mine and analyze stores of data that would have been far too large and complex to examine before. In this way, modern researchers have the opportunity to "come to new interpretations of historical facts [...] discover new relations between events", offering a more "faithful representation of the language used in the texts" as well as the historical context they represent (Jenset and McGillivray 2017, 138).

In the present investigation, the focus was on providing a more detailed and accurate picture of fugitive slave naming patterns as depicted by slave-owners in New York and New Jersey newspapers during the period of the Revolutionary War. It is hoped that this divergent geo-temporal concentration not only offers much needed information about "the heterogenous nature of racial bondage" in the United States beyond the confines of the oft-researched 19th century Southern plantation (Smith and Wojtowicz 1989, 2). It is also hoped that the insights presented here will help to heighten public sensitivity to our ancestors' courage to assert their inalienable right to live in freedom.

Notes

¹ This article is the final authorized version of a preprint released on the website of Taylor and Francis, a previous publisher of NAMES.

² According to Chadwick (1999) "over 25,000 slaves ran away during the American Revolution and earned freedom under the protection of the British Army" (17). By comparison, several hundred slaves placed their faith in the colonists' effort and joined either the local Army or local militia, in hopes of being manumitted after the war.

³ Importantly, this omission need not be race-based. Up until recently, it was still commonplace in the United States, even in formal documents such as wedding or banquet invitations, for the full names and titles of men to be recorded while the women associated with them were made reference to with only their first names.

⁴ Attestation for *Ohnech* as a first name was not located. However, this name does exist as a last name. According to Inscoc (1983, 540), it was not uncommon for US American slaves to use surnames as first names. The name *Ohnech* might fall into this category.

⁵ According to Inscoc (1983), the name *Suck* may be a shortening of the African name *Sukey*. However, Puckett (1973), hypothesizes that *Suck* is a short form of *Susanna*.

⁶ Puckett (1973) provides compelling linguistic evidence for this phenomenon. According to him, Mississippi slave owner probate records lists the names of “all livestock, human or otherwise” (171). In his analysis, 84% of the personal names given to slaves had also been given to mules.

⁷ In the absence of such corroborating information, it is not always immediately obvious how to best categorize a name. An excellent example in this data-set is the name *Frederick*. This name exists as both a personal name and a place name (e.g., Frederick, Maryland). Another potential confound is the prevalence of toponyms for ship names. During the 17th and 18th centuries, ships were often given placenames (Westerdahl 1980). Given the number of slaves who worked in and around the harbor cities of the Northeast, it is logical to assume that at least some might have had children named after vessels that were free to sail away.

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Notes on the Contributor

I. M. Nick holds a BA (Germanics), BSc (Clinical/Abnormal Psychology), MA (German Linguistics), MSc (Forensic and Investigative Psychology), as well as a PhD and the German "Habilitation" (English Linguistics). Her research areas include forensic linguistics, Holocaust Studies, slavery, and onomastics. She is the President of the Germanic Society for Forensic Linguistics (GSFL) and the Editor-in-Chief of NAMES

Correspondence to: Professor I. M. Nick, Germanic Society for Forensic Linguistics, Germany; and The American Name Society. Email: nameseditor@gmail.com