

**U. S. Customs
Service Records:
Port of
New Orleans,
Louisiana**

**Inward Slave Manifests, 1807-1860
and
Outward Slave Manifests, 1812-1860**

*Guide to the Scholarly Resources
Microfilm Edition*

Primary Source Media



Acknowledgment

This Primary Source Media microfilm publication was produced with the cooperation of the National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C.

ISBN 0-8420-4167-2 (Inward Slave Manifests)

ISBN 0-8420-4168-0 (Outward Slave Manifests)

Manufactured in the United States of America

Published 1998

Distributed on microfilm by:

Primary Source Media



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Introduction

In his landmark *Slave-Trading in the Old South*, historian Frederick Bancroft called New Orleans “The Mistress of the Trade.” The Crescent City was a major port of entry for slaves bound to the southwest and celebrated its wealth from the traffic. “Slave trading there had a peculiar dash,” according to Bancroft, “It rejoiced in its display and prosperity; it felt unashamed, almost proud.”¹ New Orleans was the most important port in the interstate slave trade, and the magnitude of its role in the trade has been recorded in the Customs Service records logged during the antebellum years.

The history of the slave trade through New Orleans stretches back to the French and Spanish colonial periods. By the time the United States purchased the Louisiana territory, the city’s slave market had been established as a regional center for the traffic. The growth of settlement throughout the southwest fed on the slave trade, and the city’s slave markets thrived as migrants from the southeast traveled to New Orleans to purchase slaves.² In addition, planters migrating west frequently shipped their slaves through New Orleans rather than make the overland trip.

The significance of New Orleans as a major slave-trading center is rooted in its size and location. The only major city in the southwest, its population had surpassed 100,000 by the 1840s. It stood as a regional marketplace,

¹ Frederick Bancroft, *Slave-Trading in the Old South* (Baltimore, 1931), 312.

² Planters frequently traveled to Virginia to purchase slaves as well; however, New Orleans was closer. On planter migration, see Joan Cashin, *A Family Venture: Men and Women on the Southern Frontier* (New York, 1991). For a discussion of the slaves’ experience, see Allan Kulikoff, *The Agrarian Origins of American Capitalism* (Charlottesville, 1992), chap. 8. See also Stephen Miller, “Plantation Labor and Slave Life on the Cotton Frontier: The Alabama-Mississippi Black Belt, 1815-1845,” in Ira Berlin and Philip D. Morgan, eds., *Cultivation and Culture: Labor and the Shaping of Slave Life in the Americas* (Charlottesville, 1989), 155-69. Neither Kulikoff nor Miller emphasizes the role of the New Orleans market in their essays.

with a hinterland stretching east as far as Alabama, north as far as Tennessee, and west to Texas. The staples of the slave economy produced in these regions, most notably cotton and sugar, but also hemp, tobacco, and corn, all came to market through New Orleans. Every year planters visited the city to sell their products, then purchase necessities, luxuries, and additional slaves.

Dozens of slave-trading firms established offices and slave stockades in New Orleans with purchasing branches in eastern cities such as Baltimore, Alexandria, Richmond, and Norfolk.³ Still others established branches in southwestern towns, especially Natchez, Vicksburg, Memphis, and Mobile. At the center of all this traffic stood New Orleans, a market where traders made no attempt to put a genteel face on the slave trade, where there was no regard for slave families, or even lies about efforts to preserve them. Instead, slave traders in New Orleans purchased and sold slaves with no questions asked. When most southern slave markets sold chiefly field hands and house servants, New Orleans traders also sold "fancy girls," smuggled African slaves, and orphans, all with little shame.

The Customs Service records provide a useful, voluminous, and consistent source for inquiry into the southwestern slave trade. The documents stand as the public business record of slave trading firms throughout the South because so many slave traders shipped their slaves through New Orleans. At the same time, by naming individual slaves, these records preserve, to some degree, the identities of the slaves who experienced the humiliation and alienation of sale and forced migration.

³ Many, if not most, of the slaves sold south originated in Virginia and Maryland. While the Carolinas and Georgia did export slaves, they continued to have thriving slave economies while the border states' slave economies were in decline, propped up in part by the slave trade. See Bancroft, *Slave-Trading in the Old South*; and Michael Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves: Masters, Traders, and Slaves in the Old South* (Madison, 1991).

Port of New Orleans, Louisiana

Recent scholarship using these records has employed them in macrocosmic quantitative studies. For instance, Michael Tadman used the manifests to track the activities of various traders in the 1840s.⁴ Older scholarship also suggests the possibility of employing the descriptive evidence found in the manifests.⁵

By focusing on particular eras and reading these records in the context of fluctuations in the American economy, cotton and other staple prices, and broader migration patterns, scholars in the future will be able to reach a deeper understanding of the broad patterns of the slave trade. In addition, the records provide opportunities to trace the activities of individual slave traders, or individual slaves, if studied with the proper supporting documentation. Thus, the Port of New Orleans inward and outward slave manifests should provide scholars with opportunities for continued inquiry into the nature of the domestic slave trade.

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May 1998

⁴Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves*, Appendix 2, esp. 232-33.

⁵Wendell Holmes Stephenson, *Isaac Franklin: Slave Trader and Planter of the Old South* (Baton Rouge, 1938), 38-40, *passim*. See also Bancroft, *Slave-Trading in the Old South*.

Roll Contents

Inward Slave Manifests, 1807-1860

Roll No.	Roll Contents
1	1807, 1819-1821
2	1822-1824
3	1825-1827
4	1828-1829
5	1830-1834
6	1835-1839
7	1840-1843
8	1844-1846
9	1847-1849
10	1850-1851
11	1852-1854
12	1855-1860

Sample Manifest

Includes manifests of negroes, mulattoes, and persons of colour, taken aboard the _____ whereof _____ master, burthen _____ tons, to be transported to the Port of New Orleans in the District of Louisiana for the purpose of being sold or disposed of as slaves, or to be held to service of labor.

Names, Sex, Age, Height, color (black, negro, mulattoe)
of slaves

Owners or shippers, Names and Residences

Outward Slave Manifests, 1812-1860

Roll No.	Roll Contents
1	1812, 1818-1823
2	1824-1827
3	1828-1833
4	1834-1840
5	1841-1845
6	1846-Nov 1847
6A	Nov 1847 (cont'd)-Jun 1850
7	Jul 1850-Mar 1853
7A	Mar-Dec 1853
8	1854-1855
9	1856-1857
9A	1858-1860

Sample Manifest

District of Mississippi

Port of New Orleans, the 22nd day of July 1818

I _____ Collector of the District of Mississippi, do hereby the within is a true copy of the original Manifest or list of slaves, left on file in this office, and I do further certify that _____ owner of the said slaves, and _____ master of the _____ have this day made oath in manner directed in the ninth section of the act of Congress passed the second day of March 1807, prohibiting the importation of slaves into the United States. I do hereby authorize the said master to proceed with the said slaves named as within, and being _____ in number, to the port of _____

Manifest of slaves aboard the _____ whereof,
_____ is the present master, bound from the Port of
New Orleans for the port of _____
Names, Sex, Age, Height, Shippers or Owners, Residence