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## Newspaper-Brokered Slave Trade Advertisements in North America, 1704-1807

Dataset Article

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### Description

This dataset focuses on newspaper advertisements in which newspaper printers acted as brokers in the sale of enslaved people. It extends from 1704, when the first long-running newspaper was published in North America, through 1807, after which the transatlantic slave trade officially ended and gradual abolition schemes in the North meant that the internal slave trade shifted slowly to the South. It contains more than 2,100 eighteenth-century North American newspaper advertisements that document the possible trafficking of at least 3,000 enslaved persons.

Newspaper printers in eighteenth-century America acted as crucial middlemen in the slave trade, especially in northern cities. Every significant newspaper printer in early America (except for those who operated in states where the slave trade was illegal) engaged in this practice of brokering the sale or rental of enslaved people, from North America's earliest newspaper printer, John Campbell of the *Boston News-Letter*, to Benjamin Franklin of the *Pennsylvania Gazette* to the many significant printers of the American Revolutionary era. Unlike "runaway" advertisements, which often documented the aspirations and experiences of a self-liberated enslaved person, notices for the sale or purchase of enslaved persons were typically quite abrupt and spare, often as short as "For sale, A Young Negro Woman, With three Children. Inquire of the Printer."<sup>1</sup>

This dataset documents newspaper printers' involvement in the slave trade and, more importantly, provides useful evidence of particular transactions involving enslaved people. Because they were advertisements, they cannot fully document sales, as some advertisements likely went unanswered. But they can demonstrate a buyer, seller, or renter's aspirations for the transfer of an enslaved person. These advertisements almost never identify an enslaved person by name, but usually provide a mix of information about an enslaved person's age, health, and skills, alongside the terms of sale. They often echo the complex language of color and appearance from advertisements about self-emancipation that historian Sharon Block discusses in *Colonial Complexions*.<sup>2</sup>

The dataset sheds particular light on the northern slave trade, where a relatively small number of enslaved people (compared to Caribbean or to the southern colonies/states of North America) meant that the slave trade developed few economic institutions of its own, and newspaper printers saw an opportunity to connect buyers and sellers. Indeed, in the northern cities, colonies, and states, the relatively limited number of enslaved people and transfers of enslaved people could allow future researchers to harness this database to identify particular advertisements with other documentation of enslaved peoples' lives.

This dataset is historiographically significant because it helps to document the extent and the particular circumstances of the eighteenth-century American slave trade, as well as the degree to which newspapers and newspaper printers served as mediators and brokers in the economy of slavery.<sup>3</sup>

## **Dates of Data Collection**

2019-2020

## **Dataset Languages**

English

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<sup>1</sup> *Independent Gazetteer* (Philadelphia), July 14, 1792.

<sup>2</sup> Sharon Block, *Colonial Complexions: Race and Bodies in Eighteenth-Century America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018)

<sup>3</sup> For a StoryMap related to this research, see

<https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/7d6dc8d7a24d34a08f1605e64c292e>.

## **Geographic Coverage**

North America

## **Temporal Coverage**

1704-1807

## **Document Types**

Newspapers

## **Sources**

*Albany Centinel*  
*Albany Gazette*  
*Albany Register*  
*Alexandria Daily Advertiser*  
*Alexandria Advertiser*  
*Alexandria Times*  
*American*  
*American and Baltimore Gazette*  
*American and Commercial Daily Advertiser*  
*American Citizen*  
*American Farmer*  
*American Mercury*  
*American Spy*  
*American Telegraphe*  
*American Weekly Mercury*  
*Apollo*  
*Augusta Chronicle*  
*Augusta Herald*  
*Baltimore Daily Intelligencer*  
*Baltimore Evening Post*  
*Bartgis's Maryland Gazette*  
*Boston Commercial Gazette*  
*Boston Evening-Post*  
*Boston Gazette*  
*Boston News-Letter*  
*Boston Post-Boy*  
*Carlisle Gazette*  
*Centinel of Freedom*  
*Centinel of Liberty*  
*Charleston Courier*  
*Charleston Evening Gazette*  
*Charleston Morning Post*

*Enslaved: Journal of Slavery and Data Preservation - Newspaper-Brokered Slave Trade  
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*City Gazette  
Columbian Centinel  
Columbian Herald  
Columbian Mirror  
Columbian Museum  
Commercial Advertiser  
Connecticut Courant  
Connecticut Gazette  
Connecticut Journal  
Constitutional Gazette  
Country Journal  
Daily Advertiser  
Daily Evening Gazette  
Delaware Gazette  
Diary or Loudon's Register  
Edward's Baltimore Daily Advertiser  
Enquirer  
Essex Gazette  
Evening Post  
Farmers Chronicle  
Federal Gazette  
Federal Intelligencer  
Freeman's Journal  
Gazette of the United States  
Genius of Liberty  
Georgetown Gazette  
Georgia Gazette  
Greenleaf's NY Journal  
Guardian of Freedom  
Hudson Gazette  
Independent Chronicle  
Independent Gazette  
Independent Gazetteer  
Independent Journal  
Independent Ledger  
Kentucky Gazette  
Knoxville Gazette  
Lynchburg Weekly Gazette  
Maryland Chronicle  
Maryland Gazette  
Maryland Herald  
Maryland Journal  
Massachusetts Gazette  
Massachusetts Mercury  
Massachusetts Spy*

*Mercantile Advertiser  
Middlesex Gazette  
Minerva  
Mirror  
Mirror of the Times  
National Intelligencer  
New England Courant  
New England Weekly Journal  
New England Chronicle  
New Jersey State Gazette  
New York Gazette  
New York Journal  
New York Mercury  
New-Jersey Gazette  
New-Jersey Journal  
New-London Summary  
New-York Daily Gazette  
New-York Evening Post  
New-York Gazette  
New-York Gazetteer  
New-York Journal  
New-York Mercury  
New-York Morning Post  
New-York Packet  
New-York Weekly Journal  
Newport Gazette  
Newport Mercury  
New-Hampshire Gazette  
New Jersey Journal  
Norfolk and Portsmouth Chronicle  
Norfolk and Portsmouth Herald  
Norfolk and Portsmouth Journal  
Norfolk Gazette  
Norwich Packet  
Otsego Herald  
Patriot  
Pennsylvania Chronicle  
Pennsylvania Evening Herald  
Pennsylvania Evening Post  
Pennsylvania Gazette  
Pennsylvania Journal  
Pennsylvania Ledger  
Pennsylvania Mercury  
Pennsylvania Packet  
People's Friend*

*Enslaved: Journal of Slavery and Data Preservation - Newspaper-Brokered Slave Trade  
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*Petersburg Intelligencer  
Philadelphia Gazette  
Political Barometer  
Porcupine's Gazette  
Poughkeepsie Journal  
Providence Gazette  
Republican  
Republican Gazette  
Republican Star  
Richmond Recorder  
Rights of Man  
Rising Sun  
Rivington's NY Gazetteer  
Royal American Gazette  
Royal Georgia Gazette  
Savannah Republican  
South Carolina State Gazette  
South-Carolina Gazette  
South-Carolina Independent Gazette  
Southern Centinel  
State Gazette of South Carolina  
Staunton Eagle  
Stewart Kentucky Herald  
Telegraph and Charleston Daily Advertiser  
Tennessee Gazette  
Times  
Trenton Federalist  
Ulster Gazette  
United States Chronicle  
Utica Gazette  
Virginia Argus  
Virginia Chronicle  
Virginia Gazette  
Virginia Herald  
Virginia Telegraphe  
Washington Federalist  
Washington Spy  
Waterford Gazette  
Weekly Rehearsal  
Western American*

The newspapers utilized here were accessed via Readex's *America's Historical Newspapers* database and Newspapers.com. Note that while many of these newspapers continued publication past 1807, this dataset only includes advertisements through that year. Some newspapers were consulted for this project that are not included in the list above, or in the

dataset, because they did not return any relevant results. Most of those are newspapers published for only a short time.

## Methodology

I constructed this dataset by examining two digital databases of early American newspapers. Most useful was Readex's *America's Historical Newspapers* database, which includes the majority of early American newspaper issues. Additionally, the site Newspapers.com helped to fill gaps in the Readex database in the early years of the *Pennsylvania Gazette* and William Bradford's *New-York Gazette*. Except for the titles in Newspapers.com (which has a limited search functionality and which I examined issue-by-issue), I identified these advertisements by searching for variants of the term "Enquire of the Printer" and "Apply to the Printer" that were adjacent to terms such as "Negro," "Indian," "Black," and "Slave."

The limitations of Optical Character Recognition (OCR) mean that I have inevitably missed some advertisements. Without devoting years to combing through each issue of each newspaper, this was unavoidable. However, by comparing my OCR-driven text search of the Readex database to my issue-by-issue analysis of the *Pennsylvania Gazette* and the *New-York Gazette*, I am confident that my dataset contains the majority, if not the vast majority, of such advertisements from 1704 through 1807.

Most of these advertisements are fairly straightforward and contain relatively little transcribable data. Whereas advertisements for self-emancipated enslaved people often documented an enslaved person's aspirations, advertisements that seek out potential buyers often described an idealized enslaved person. Nevertheless, many of the advertisements contain some valuable insight into the lives and experiences of particular enslaved people.

Most of these advertisements described one or more enslaved person, their age, their gender or descriptor (Fellow, Child, Woman, Boy, Wench, etc.), their characteristics relevant to a sale (health, "likely," "breed," strength, special skills), as well as terms about the transfer ("To be given away," "Sold for no Fault, but for want of Employment," "Has about nine years to serve," "Cash will be paid"). I have transcribed these descriptors and variables as accurately as possible in each column, though I have not transcribed the full text of each advertisement.

The dataset I created contains columns for each of the descriptors of enslaved people contained in the advertisement. It also includes a date for the initial advertisement (I have not included subsequent iterations of the advertisements, which sometimes ran for several issues) as well as the city and colony/state of publication and the name of the publication. The date is sequenced in YYYY-MM-DD format.

## Date of Publication

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## Data Links

Dataset Repository: Harvard Dataverse <https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/EJOJJO>

Linked Data Representation: *Enslaved.org* [Summary Visualization](#)

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