
New Orleans Slave Sample, 1804–1862
[Instructional Materials]

Handout (PDF)

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ICPSR 3464

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DATA COLLECTION DESCRIPTION

James W. Oberly

New Orleans Slave Sample, 1804-1862 [Instructional Materials]
(ICPSR 3464)

SUMMARY: These instructional materials were prepared for use with NEW ORLEANS SLAVE SALE SAMPLE, 1804-1862 (ICPSR 7423), compiled by Robert W. Fogel and Stanley L. Engerman. The data file (an SPSS portable file) and accompanying documentation are provided to assist educators in instructing students about the economics of slavery and the lives of the people recorded in the slave market. An instructor's handout is also included. This handout contains the following sections, among others: (1) general goals for student analysis of quantitative datasets, (2) specific goals in studying this dataset, (3) suggested appropriate courses for use of the dataset, (4) tips for using the dataset, and (5) related secondary source readings. The dataset includes data on slave sales that occurred on the New Orleans slave market between 1804-1862. For each sale, information was recorded on the date of the sale, the number of slaves on the invoice, the geographical origin of the buyer and seller, the sale price, and characteristics of the slaves sold (age, sex, family relationship, and occupation). The information presented for each transaction was obtained from the notarized bills of sale in the New Orleans Notarial Archival Office. These bills often contained information on several persons who were sold in a group or as a "lot." Whenever feasible, sale and personal characteristics of individuals appearing in such groups were entered on separate records. This was usually done when separate sale prices were recorded for each member of the group. When separate prices were not recorded for children sold in a group, information describing those children was attached to the record of a principal slave with whom they were associated on the original bill of sale.

UNIVERSE: Slave sales on the New Orleans slave market between 1804-1862.

SAMPLING: Depending on the period of the sale transaction, either 2.5 percent or 5 percent of the bills of sale for each year were drawn to form the final sample.

NOTE: (1) This collection is part of SIMI (Site for Instructional Materials and Information), an ICPSR initiative to promote the use of social science data in undergraduate education through the sharing of faculty-submitted ICPSR data-based instructional materials developed for classroom use. (2) These materials were

designed for use with the dataset NEW ORLEANS SLAVE SALE SAMPLE, 1804-1862 (ICPSR 7423). (3) The data are provided as an SPSS portable file, which was created from the ASCII data and SPSS data definition statement files available from ICPSR 7423. (4) The codebook and handout files are provided by ICPSR as Portable Document (PDF) files. The PDF file format was developed by Adobe Systems Incorporated and can be accessed using the PDF reader software, such as the Adobe Acrobat Reader. Information on how to obtain a copy of the Acrobat Reader is provided on the ICPSR Web site.

EXTENT OF COLLECTION: 1 data file + machine-readable documentation (PDF and MS Word 9.0)

EXTENT OF PROCESSING: REFORM.DOC

DATA FORMAT: SPSS portable

Cases: 5,009

Variables: 47

Investigating African-American Life under Slavery: The New Orleans Sample of Slave Sales, 1804-1862

by [James Oberly](#), Department of History, University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire

General Goals of Student Analysis of Quantitative Datasets:

Student use of quantitative datasets in history accomplishes several pedagogical goals. First, the datasets are compilations of primary sources, taken from the manuscript census and other listings. Studying primary sources, even once removed as datasets, is important as a way to introduce students to primary sources in history. Moreover, the very nature of computer analysis requires students to ask questions of the dataset in order to generate any output, and then to analyze the results and make sense of what they find. In addition, asking students to generate findings from a dataset helps them improve their ability to make sense of numerical information. Combining numerical analysis with a written report on their findings makes this type of assignment complete, at least as far as the development of reading, analysis, and writing. These are important goals that are part of any liberal education. An additional outcome of using datasets for undergraduate instruction is that students are included in the community of scholars who use the same materials and methods to formulate original contributions to knowledge. Senior majors in history and social sciences such as economics, political science, and sociology can examine the datasets produced by the leading scholars in the field. At a minimum, this teaching method helps the students to understand better the findings summarized in the textbook, monograph, or journal article they are assigned. Quite often, students are able to pose new questions of their own and test them with the ICPSR databases.

Specific Content Goals of Investigating “African-American Life under Slavery”:

New Orleans emerged as the largest city of the Slave South in the years before the Civil War and as the main cotton exporting port. As such, it naturally became a center for internal slave trading. The principal investigators of this database, Robert W. Fogel and Stanley L. Engerman, estimate that between 1804 and 1862 there were about 200,000 slaves sold in the city market, a staggering number to comprehend. The principal investigators drew a sample size of 2.5 percent to reach 5,000 cases. This is a database where the analysis of price is the key variable. Unfortunately, the price is that of human beings for sale. So do keep in mind that there was real human misery behind these numbers. Also, keep in mind that the records that this dataset quantifies were created by the owners and sellers of African-American slaves. The records do not reflect the

slaves's own view of their lives, of course. However, there are few, if any, written records left for history by the 5,000 African-Americans in this dataset. With that said, let us use the data in the file to analyze the economics of slavery and learn what we can about the lives of the people recorded in the slave market.

Data Source:

ICPSR Study No. 7423, “ New Orleans Slave Sale Sample, 1804-1862, ” by Robert W. Fogel and Stanley L. Engerman.

Suggested Appropriate Courses for Use:

History Curriculum: African-American History; Slavery, Civil War, and Reconstruction.
Economics Curriculum: U.S. Economic History.

The Files, available on the ICPSR-SIMI Website:

- 1) Instructor's Handout (this document). File size=42k, as an MS-Word file.
- 2) Codebook, which lists the variables in the dataset and their values. This is important for the instructor and the students to have together to decide on the questions to ask of the dataset, and to make sense of the output. Please note that the Principal Investigator(s) who compiled the dataset from the primary sources also devised the codebook. File size=32k, as an MS-Word file.
- 3) Dataset, as an SPSS portable file. You can use SPSS to open the dataset and then save it as a system file. Another option in SPSS, after you have opened the file, is to export it as a spreadsheet file for application in Microsoft Excel. File size=722k, as an SPSS portable file.

Other Sources, available on the Web:

- 1) ICPSR Web site, at www.icpsr.umich.edu, contains the description of the dataset written by the Principal Investigators. Type the ICPSR Study Number into the site search engine to reach the description of the dataset and a version of the codebook in .pdf format.
- 2) SPSS User's Manual, available from www.spss.com, which may be useful to more advanced technical operations.

Tips about using the dataset:

1. Select Cases—The dataset contains sales cases for both individuals and groups of slaves. It makes sense to concentrate on the individuals only, if only to reduce the

complexity of the research task. Therefore, run a “Select Cases” (DATA MENU/SELECT cases) and paste in v46 and choose the option where the value is 1, for individuals. Then run a frequency tabulation. What do you get for an answer?

2. Recode—Some of the categories, such as occupation and skin color, can be compressed into fewer values. Try the Recode command (TRANSFORM MENU/RECODE) and recode v17 into a new variable for color with a value of one for mixed race and a value of two for not mixed race. Are you unsure about some of the names of the colors listed under v17? Go to the Oxford English Dictionary for help and look up the terms. Similarly, recode v42 into a new variable for skill with a value of one for unskilled and a value of two for skilled. Note that you can use the DATA/DEFINE VARIABLES/LABELS sequence to write in value labels for your new variables.
3. Frequency Tabulation—You can get a frequency distribution for each of the variables in the dataset with the procedure ANALYZE/DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS/FREQUENCIES and paste in one or more (or all) the variables in the pop-up box. SPSS will generate an output file for you, which you can view, save, or print. Try getting a frequency count on the simplest variable in the dataset, V15 for “sex.” What does the frequency distribution show for this variable?
4. Crosstabulation—This procedure produces a more complex tabulation that is the result of comparing a slave in the sample on two or more variables. For example, now that you know the frequency distribution of the people by gender (v15), why not see how men and women were distributed by one of the more unusual variables in the dataset, V17 for “skin color.” What results do you get? What do you think it means, if anything? Note that SPSS has a “Statistics” option on the Crosstabulations procedure that lets you select a Chi-Square test to determine the statistical significance of the relationship between the two variables.
5. Bivariate Regression—Tips 3 and 4 use SPSS to establish simple relationships among and between variables, tabulating frequencies and running simple cross-tabulations. We are now ready to try to advance to hypothesis testing where we pose a question and run a procedure to determine if a statistical relationship exists, and if so, is it likely by chance. The easiest of these tests is bivariate regression, which measures the effect of variable X on variable Y. For us, let Y be the variable for price (v14). Try X as your recoded variable for color or for occupation, or you could try v15 (gender). To run a regression, go to the ANALYZE menu, then select CORRELATE, then BIVARIATE, and paste in V14 for one variable and whatever one you chose for X as the independent variable. When you run the procedure, you will get a coefficient which tells you the relationship between X and Y, where 1 is a perfect fit, and zero a complete lack of fit.
6. Multiple Regression—you can run more than one X variable as a predictor of what will happen to changes in Y (price)? Use the command ANALYZE/REGRESSION/LINEAR and try at least two independent variables. You might want to print your output table. You will want to pay close attention to the “F” statistic, the “r-squared” statistic, the “F” statistic, and the “t” statistic and significance factors for each of the independent variables.

7. Graphing—Feel free to graph some of the independent variables you selected for bivariate and multiple regression against v14. Make use of the GRAPHS/SCATTER procedure and look at the distribution.

Big Questions:

- 1) Price—What do you find are the most important predictors of changes in the prices paid for slaves? Gender? Age? Skin color? Occupation? What about the “guarantee” or lack thereof? How about the year, between 1804 and 1862? Which variables did you think would be significant but turned out to be not very important? Can you explain why some of your hypotheses were verified and others not?
- 2) Family breakup—Go back and take off the filter (Select Cases) for v46, the variable that indicates whether a slave sale involved just one individual or more than one. Now analyze the variables for family status and number of slaves on the sale invoice. What can you learn about the structure of sales? What can you infer about the connection, if any, between slave sales and family stability?
- 3) Opportunities under slavery?—One of the more controversial propositions put forward by Fogel and Engerman was that slaves had some opportunities for advancement on the plantation, at least into better jobs. What do the data about occupations show from the New Orleans slave sales? Is there a connection between occupation and skin color? Gender? What is your analysis of the possibilities for improvement and advancement under slavery?

Related Readings:

Robert W. Fogel and Stanley L. Engerman, Time on the Cross: The Economics of American Negro Slavery. Two volumes. Boston: Little, Brown, 1974.

Robert W. Fogel, Without Consent or Contract: The Rise and Fall of American Slavery. New York: W. W. Norton, 1989.

James Mellon, editor. Bullwhip Days: The Slaves Remember. New York: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1988.

Question & Comments?: [Email me](#) or telephone me at 715-836-4599. Surface mail: Department of History/UW-Eau Claire Eau Claire, WI 54701
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