UNCOVERING FAITH AND RECLAIMING FREEDOM IN THE AMERICAN COURTS

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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Individuality and identity are often absent in the histories of enslaved people. This absence leaves a gap in the ability to understand the different demographics of enslaved communities. One notably absent community from research is enslaved Muslims. This paper examines the significance court cases hold in uncovering the historical accounts of enslaved Muslims. Scholarship has failed to center Islam as a critical principle and thread when analyzing the history of enslaved people and subsequently African American history. Through the analysis of court cases and focus on Muslim names, various historical accounts can be uncovered that provide more insight into the lives of enslaved Muslims in the United States.
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Introduction

The history of Muslims in America is often focused on Arab migration and is relatively recent. Yet, there were thousands of enslaved Muslims present in the Americas whose histories are unacknowledged. The issue is two-fold; the history of enslaved people and their connection to Africa is an area of scholarship that is still narrow. Secondly, Black people are disassociated from their Muslim identity. Scholarship lacks a central thesis around Islam that is a continuous thread when analyzing and discussing African American history from the time of enslavement to the present. Christianity certainly holds a central place in a lot of historical analyses, but Islam does not have a place. It is absent from many crucial arguments and regarded as a tangent. The purpose of this paper is to address a significant lack of Muslim representation in the study of enslaved people and demonstrate the significance of court documents by revealing the potential record of enslaved Muslims they hold.

The failure to center the lives of the enslaved leaves a huge hole in the ability to understand the creation and formation of the United States. Economically and socially, America was shaped by the slave system but the narrative on the establishment of the United States is centered around the founding fathers. New scholarship continues to address this gap including the work of Nikole Hannah-Jones. Her work, *The 1619 Project*, challenges the focus on 1776 as the starting point for the United States and instead asserts that 1619 the year the first slave ship arrived in Virginia as the proper framing to form a more accurate understanding of the nation’s history. There is still resistance to
her work and the incorporation of enslaved history as critical to understanding U.S. history. While there is significant literature around the system of slavery and the impact on those enslaved, there is still a gap when it comes to infusing that history with a religious understanding.

Enslaved people did not appear overnight in the United States. They were stolen from various places and came from somewhere with culture, heritage, and religion. Sometimes religion and culture are so infused that the difference can not be seen by an outsider and at times even to the community itself the line is blurred. Many enslaved people came from West African countries where Islam was dominant meaning Islam was steeped into their lives and the social aspects of their lives. Researchers have debated the number of enslaved Muslims that could have been present, but it has been estimated that between fifteen and thirty percent of enslaved Africans in the Antebellum South were Muslim and could have been as high as 1.2 million people. Yet, Islam remains absent as a component and critical factor in the analysis of the history of the enslaved in the United States.

Scholars have addressed this gap and its effects on historical scholarship. In Sylvianne Diouf’s book Servants of Allah, she outlines how enslaved Muslims from West Africa held on to their faith in the Americas with a focus on Brazil. Michael Gomez in his article “Muslims in Early America”, also notes the absent but necessary dialogue between historians of Africa and North America. He

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states that his work is “an effort to establish a more reliable context for the investigation of Muslims in early America and this assist in the much needed exchange and collaboration between Africanists and Americanists.” The work of Diouf and Gomez is among a limited but growing scholarship that is building a foundation for the centrality of Islam in conversations surrounding the slave trade and the history of those enslaved.

A select few enslaved Muslims have received both scholarly attention and attention in the public sphere. Omar Ibn Said, Yarrow Marmout, and Salih Bilali, are among the few individuals that stand out. In the National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington D.C., a whole floor is dedicated to Slavery and Freedom from 1400-1877. In this exhibit a small section was dedicated to religion, the plaque read that many enslaved people “became active in Christian churches, moved by evangelical messages emphasizing God’s love.” This provoked in my mind questions around the narrative that many enslaved people converted to Christianity. How much of a choice did they have? It seems it was a part of the erasure of the identity of people who were enslaved. The following line on that plaque reads “Others pulled from western African traditions including Christianity, Islam, and indigenous faiths. Each religion helped build an identity beyond slavery and discrimination.” Although this sentence gives recognition to the presence of other faiths, it does not allude to the dominance of Islam in early enslaved communities. They do however feature small panels in

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the exhibit on the stories of well-known Muslims including Ayuba Sulieman Diallo (Job Ben Solomon) who wrote memoirs as an enslaved Muslim and Mahommah Baquaqua who was also able to document the horrors he experienced as an enslaved person. The featuring of these historical figures is important, but relative to the size of the exhibit and the history of enslaved Muslims the representation is very minimal.

The emphasis on the stories of a select few enslaved Muslims complicates the narrative around enslaved Muslims in the United States. As Gomez explains,

“Many of the accounts concerning them regularly refer to other enslaved Muslims, who, because they did not share in the special circumstance, did not receive significant recognition. Therefore, the attention that these seven are accorded in the literature is misleading because it conveys the idea that Muslims were very rare in number.”

The fixation on literate Muslims as “extraordinary” has enforced this idea of Muslims being rare. It has discounted the larger population of enslaved Muslims present in America and created a lack of attention to a larger focus on their presence. It impacts the analysis and depth of research. For example, in the exhibit at the National Museum of African American History, a dark plaque read “Their singing...[was] always in tears, in so much that one captain... threatened one of the women with a flogging because the mournfulness of her song was too painful for his feelings. – William Corbett 1806.” As I read this, I could not help

3 Gomez, 690.
but wonder what if the singing was not a song, but instead verses of the Quran? The Quran is not read like scripture in the bible but rather recited in ways that could be mistaken for a song. The context of where the slaves were taken from and the significance of Islam can aid in the contextualization of information and quotes like this. This dismissal of Islam is also present in the legal system and legal history.

The court system is a repository of important information of the past but it has been neglected when it comes to enslaved Muslims. Islam itself is ignored as a faith relevant to enslaved people. Beydoun states that “legal commentators have failed to recognize Islam as either an ‘African religion’ or a ‘slave religion’”

Islam as a dominant religion in West Africa existed through the belief of people and their practice. When they were stolen off their land and enslaved in the United States, Islam came with them and was one of the dominant religions among enslaved communities. The dismissal of religion amongst enslaved people is also addressed by Mustafa Amin Farooq in his paper, “Legal Representation of Muslim Slaves.” He builds on Orlando Patterson’s argument of enslaved people not as property but rather as “socially dead” people. As individual people, their identities including name, culture, and religion are irrelevant when they are enslaved. This creates a process of erasure of identities

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4 Beydoun, 155.

and whole communities. Notably, the erasure of names is an essential strategy for preventing identity.

The importance of a name can be understood by the weight people give it and the time parents grapple over the name of their children. A name is also a way to honor parents or significant people in their lives by passing on names to their children. Names are also a way to hold on to tradition, heritage, and religion. Thus, the erasure of enslaved people’s chosen names is a way to eliminate evidence of identity including religion. Farooq states that,

“The changing of names was designed to strip slaves of their social ties and African heritage. Names were closely linked to identity, and to change one’s name ‘was arguably a way to forge a new … identity’. While the impact and reasoning that masters utilized in changing the names of their slaves is a matter of historical debate, it has an important impact on scholars studying this area. Oftentimes, names that signify a Muslim heritage are changed.”

This erasure of names makes it difficult to locate and identify Muslims in history and in historical court cases. Farooq acknowledges this and in his analysis of court cases that identifiably involve Muslims, he addresses the lack of recognition of their faith and their status as “socially dead.” Farooq throughout the article points to names that are Muslim as evidenced by other sources including advertisements for runaway slaves. Names that were Muslim indicators were

\[6\] Farooq, 16.
present and spread through the different articles and books I read and provided me with the base of my research.

The reference to the various enslaved Muslims in the bodies of literature I reviewed provides me with a list of names from these secondary sources. This became a collection of entries that continued to grow and exists as a keyword list to aid me in my search through various databases. My focus was on legal databases and judicial reviews of court cases. As I sifted through the databases and books, I also added to the list names that could potentially be Muslim given my knowledge of Arabic and Islam. There are no databases that exist that could be used to cross-reference and confirm Muslim identity or a history of enslavement from Muslim countries. It would require sifting through slave ledgers and other primary source documents as a point of confirmation and creating a more comprehensive list. Although this method is not infallible, the presence of Muslim names and the repetition of them does confirm a Muslim existence. At the very least the names can be used to narrow the materials available and dive into the primary sources to further analyze different historical connections to Islam.

The significance of having a record of Muslim names that changed is that it allows for the ability to work backward from the aliases that do not have ties to Islam and address the potential of Muslim background if the documents or case provokes suspicion. The value of creating a record of names and pseudonyms lies in the ability to also cross-reference and understand how the names were erased. Historical cases may not always give information on faith, but they often
reference the names of the enslaved children as well especially in cases around enslaved people as disputes in property or wills. This becomes valuable when it comes to piecing together ancestries and family trees as will be explained in section II of this paper.

The idea of identity has been stripped away from the history of enslaved people. The historical research done on the time period of slavery has not been inclusive or focused on the enslaved people’s histories and familial connections. The history has been incomplete because Islam has been a missing component in a great deal of scholarly work and research. Uncovering the faith of enslaved people allows for a better understanding of the formed enslaved communities and generations that followed.

In Section I, I outline the details of a Supreme Court Case in New Jersey that was defended by the famous abolitionist lawyer, Alvin Stewart, in 1845. During this time slavery was legal in New Jersey, but the state had passed the 1804 Gradual Abolition Act. This stated that children born to enslaved people after July 4, 1804, had to serve “their mother's master for twenty-five years if male or twenty-one years if female”\(^7\). It was on the basis of this law that Stewart advocated for the freedom of three enslaved people in the court case. The significance of this case lies in building a foundation for the presence of religion in the courtroom and arguments heavily centered on the principles of Christianity. In the fine print of this court case, information can also be found about Islam and the understanding of the Muslim world. Stewart’s arguments provide context for

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the understanding of the place of enslaved people in the court system and the role of religion.

Section II will explore the humble but growing list of names I have gathered that are historical names of enslaved Muslims. Using this list, I sifted through historical court cases to find cases that point to enslaved Muslims. I then review three court cases from my findings and analyze their significance. Section III will provide a list of potential places this information can be used and how it can be used with other scholarly work already published. It will be established how this work in conjunction with other work can elevate scholarly conversations and push forward the thinking and understanding of the lives of enslaved people in the United States. The conclusion will tie in all three sections as well as ask questions about how the gap of Islam in the early history of America has impacted later histories. It will comment on the impact of the Nation of Islam and Elijah Muhammad, but also the lack of attention to Islam when it comes to the larger analysis of the Black Arts Movement and Black Power Movement.
Section I:

It is a false statement that in colonial America, White people did not understand enslaved people’s backgrounds or histories no matter how minimal or basic the understanding was. The blanket statement that enslaved people are from Africa is an attempt to minimize the individuality and complexity of the lives of those enslaved. Beyond geography, faith was a large component of identity among enslaved communities that many histories exclude as a principal thesis in studies on enslaved communities. The imposition of Christianity on enslaved people was an effort to further control and restrict the freedoms of those imprisoned in plantations. When people are forced out of their homes, taken from their community into a foreign land, and unable to practice their faith, they are stripped from their individuality and identity as human beings. The dehumanization of Black people in America was a method of maintaining White Supremacy and maintaining the system of slavery. If enslaved people as a whole are from “Africa” and not from Senegambia or Liberia then their faith is viewed as incorrect or absent, non-existent waiting to embrace the Christian faith. The court system can reveal perspectives on faith in the nation in early America.

The United States’ legal system was not secular, nor did it shun conversations on faith. America remains “one nation under God”. It is not legal protocol or jargon that excluded conversations on faith. In fact, many arguments made by lawyers were rooted in the Christian faith. A primary example is the case State v. Post; State v. Van Beuren reached the Supreme Court of NJ in 1845. The cases involved two slaves owned by John A. Post and the daughter of
a slave indentured to Edward Van Beuren who had applied for writs of habeas corpus after the new constitution of New Jersey was adopted in 1844. The three Black people involved in the case, two enslaved and one indentured servant, were technically represented by the State thus the title of the case. Their attorney was Alvan Stewart, a New York abolitionist.⁸

Alvan Stewart in his career as an attorney became a very well-known advocate for antislavery. He became one of the leading defenders of the argument of the unconstitutionality of slavery.⁹ In this court case he argued for about eleven hours in contrast to the defendant’s five hours. Stewart’s speech was captivating and eloquent, in the scanner’s notes it states, “to recreate the speech, and persuasive effect, you may wish to speak aloud some or all of it.”¹⁰ This expresses the extent of passion and commitment to his argument that came through in court.

Stewarts’ speech is rooted in Christianity and Christian beliefs. The conversations in the courtroom around religion mean that there is space to have conversations around Islam. Certainly, among the educated elite of America, Islam was very well-known, even if it was misunderstood as a religion. Yet, the imposition of Christianity on enslaved people was an attempt to humanize them

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however misguided. In Stewart’s speech, he does allude to an understanding of Islam and Muslim countries despite rooting the arguments for freedom in Christian ethics.

Early on in his speech, Stewart makes a reference to the Egyptian ruler of the time stating,

“nothing has been held so cheap as our common humanity, on a national average. If every man had his aliquot proportion of the injustice done in this land, by law and violence, the present freemen of the northern section would many of them commit suicide in self-defence, and would court the liberties awarded by Ali Pasha of Egypt to his subjects.”

Stewart is emphasizing the cruelty of slavery and if other Americans, i.e., White people, experienced a fraction of the inhumanity enslaved people faced they would commit suicide as a way to protect themselves. He then compares the conditions in the United States to the circumstance in Egypt under the ruler at that time, Ali Pasha, and asserts it would be more favorable to live there. It is a bold critique of a country claiming its democracy and trying to assert itself as a revolutionary nation compared to Egypt that was under Ottoman rule. An insult to America that this foreign country has more liberties, but also a slight to Egypt that it should not be compared to the United States.

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Stewart mentions Egypt again in a Biblical sense as he references the story of Pharaoh. He dedicates a rather lengthy section of his speech to this biblical reference. Stewart goes into detail on the eventual fall and demise of Pharaoh for the enslavement and oppression of his people and for standing between them and their conscience; he says:

“For slavery overthrows the will of the victim, and the claim of the Almighty to the adoration of his creatures; and no power can get in between God and man, and interfere on this subject, unless it is slavery.

Slavery breaks down the will, volition, and choice of its victim; the slaveholder steps in between the slave and his Maker, and says, Oh, slave, talk not of conscience, your religion, or your God; do my will, or die; my will is your law, and not your God’s; my will you must obey, or die.”

The usage of the word “choice” is notable because enslaved people had no free will, nor choice. By definition, enslaved people were stolen from their homeland and born into bondage that entrapped future generations and broke families. Stewart invokes the name of God to assert that choice is necessary for the workshop of God. Yet, in the process of the enslavement of people from different countries across Africa, faiths were eliminated and they were forbidden to practice or worship in the ways their ancestors had. The system of slavery asserts that masters should be worshiped and not God. Stewart is arguing that the system of slavery eliminates the people’s ability to follow God’s will so that the highest power remains in the control of man. The alternative to obedience is

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12 Stewart, 47.
death. Slavery removes free will and one of its most egregious crimes is standing in the way of faith and worship.

The idea of identity and choice is explained through the lens of religion. Stewart continues on the ideas of individuality by speaking of personhood. Stewart states

“mean this, and nothing more; and you can legally no more express the idea of a slave by it than you can that of a King. A man who is a slave according to slave law, has lost his personage, if I may so speak, and has passed into chattelhood, or thinghood, and all the rights of person are annihilated, or in a state of suspended animation, until the pure air of Liberty inflates his lungs again.”

The eleven hours’ worth of arguments elicits many memorable quotes that flow and thread into an eloquent speech in front of the Supreme Court of the state, but at the end of the day the idea is simple; people are people and not things. Therefore, as Stewart argues the protection to the people offered in the Constitution applies to everyone. A person is a human being whether a king or enslaved. The burden of proof thus lies in proving a person is enslaved because all people are free as per the Constitution.

Stewart’s interpretation of the Constitution was a way to challenge the legality of slavery. He believed that the federal government could end slavery in all states based on the Fifth Amendment.\(^\text{13}\) He asserts that it is a mistake to fixate on what the founding fathers meant or what intentions they had. Stewart

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\(^{13}\) Finkelman, 151.
criticizes those who want to analyze the Madison Papers to look for answers. The constitution was not written as a document to uphold the opinions of the forefathers, but rather the document was written to be adopted by the people of the republic. Stewart says:

"We knew the old and true meaning of a republican government to be one in which the government was made by and for the benefit of the governed, and that each person in a republican form of government was born free and equal, and entitled to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."\(^\text{14}\)

Thus, everyone is free and the burden of proof is not to prove an enslaved person’s right to freedom, but to prove that person is indeed enslaved. This is supported by his understanding of the Fifth Amendment’s clause, “nor be deprived of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law.”\(^\text{15}\) In order for any freedoms to be taken away, there must be a process of law and trial to prove a deed or action occurred. The default is freedom and not slavery unless proven otherwise. The supreme court is tasked with the interpretation of the constitution and the law of the land; even modern conversations on applying laws tend to fixate on the founding fathers and what they intended when writing and signing the constitution. However, Stewart’s argument is compelling and favors a more democratic republic; that the burden of the interpretation should lie in what is in

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\(^{14}\) Stewart, 57.

the best interest of the governed and what best protects their choice and freedoms.

The institution of slavery not only exists in opposition to the Constitution as Stewart asserts, but also in opposition to Christianity as rooted in his previous points. Stewart states:

"'Thou shalt not kill'. I will kill, says the slaveholder, if it is necessary, by flogging to obtain submission; or if the slave will run from me when I tell him to stop, I will shoot and kill him, and Southern law says, amen." …

"Thou shalt not commit adultery…” "‘Thou shalt not steal.’ I will steal, and appropriate, says the slaveholder, all the man hath, all he can earn, and the man himself, when my interest can be promoted thereby.”¹⁶

This is a very powerful contrast of what faith preaches versus what is practiced. It is also an expression of the violation and inhumanity of slavery and the acts enslavers commit. In this sense, it is useful to analyze the social lens in which the argument was created. The United States is very much a Christian nation, even sects like Catholicism were not accepted. The laws were understood through a Christian lens and created as such. In this case, slavery not only broke the laws of the Constitution, but also the covenant with God. Enslavers kill and steal, breaking laws that among White men would result in prison. Stewart emphasizes this by stating, “not a single white person has yet been executed for the murder of the colored man. The white is frequently hung in the slave States for stealing

¹⁶ Stewart, 52.
slaves, but not for killing them."\textsuperscript{17} Enslaved people are more valued as property because stealing them is stealing another White man’s property. That is punishable but not the enslavement of another life. I would be remiss not to point out the echoes in this case with the current crises of the oppressive police system where White officers are not held accountable. Attorneys today still need to fight against the oppressive interpretation and implementation of laws that dehumanize and fail to protect Black people.

Despite Stewart's focus on the establishment of personhood and a sense of individuality, there is little attention on the enslaved people involved in the case. Mary Tebout, her mother, and William are the three persons mentioned in this trial. Mary's mother is never mentioned by name. Wiliam is referred to as a colored man and his name never actually appears in the trial; it only does in the description of the case explaining that he is a colored man who is about sixty years old. Mary is mentioned during the trial only twice. Stewart references the New Jersey 1804 Gradual Abolition Act given that females should be free after they turn twenty-one. He criticized the laws claim to free enslaved people stating that Mary born after 1820 was still born into slavery. Stewart stated, "What is the difference between this Mary Tebout and her mother? Nothing, until Mary has passed 21 years of unrewarded toil. She is called a servant, she is said to be born free, now but 19, and has been sold three times."\textsuperscript{18} Regardless of the difference in legal language and the technicality of Mary being held as an “apprentice,” at nineteen years old she has experienced being sold three times

\textsuperscript{17} Stewart, 52.
\textsuperscript{18} Stewart, 37.
and the same experience of enslavement that her mother had. The importance of court documents is that here it uncovers a glimpse into Mary’s life and experience; no matter how little the information is the value is significant.

Towards the closing of his argument, Stewart describes an angel that travels from the Andes to Columbia, Venezuela, Haiti and beyond repeating “all men are created free and equal.”

It is with this context that he states,

The angel balanced on his pinions, flew and cried in the ears of the Bey of Tunis, and in the Egyptian Ali Pasha’s, “that all men are created free and equal.” These sons of Mahomet heard, and the Heaven-made-decree obeyed, and in those lands of darkness and of death, in one day each slave cried out, “I am free! I am free!”

This story serves as a way to express that men should be free from east to west around the world, but also those of different faiths. Islam was commonly referred to as the sons of Mahomet or even Mohammadens. In Islam, Mohammad is the last prophet, but he is not worshipped or referred to as the son of God like Jesus is in Christianity. The Bey of Tunis is the leader of Tunis at the time and here again, he refers to the ruler of Egypt. The Arab-Muslim world was understood, but as Khaled Beydoun argues in his article, “Antebellum Islam,” the Muslim identity was understood as separate from Black identity. Stewart in his argument viewed the ethics of the country through the Christian lens, but he is well aware of Islam as evidenced by “sons of Mahomet.” However, it might have

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19 Stewart, 68.
20 Stewart, 69.
21 Beydoun,155.
never been a consideration to him that the people he defended in that case or other multiple cases in his career were also Muslims themselves present in the same room and not just in Egypt.

The document does not detail the arguments of the opposing side. However, it does note Stewart’s response to some key points that the defendant’s lawyer, Zabriskie, mentions. For one he ridiculed Zabriskie’s claim that the freedom of slaves would mean that wives and children could come to court to ask for freedom from their husbands and parents. Stewart's exact words were, “The bare statement of so strange a proposition relieves me from a reply to it.” 22 He also criticized Zabriskie’s attempt to use words that acted as a dog whistle,

The gentleman has endeavored to alarm the sensibilities of the Court, by a parade of several distinct orders of modern philosophers, known under the name of Fouriers, Anti-Renters, Socialists, Owenites, Fanny Wrighters, Non-Resistants, and No-Human-Government-men, Dissolvers of the Union, Nullifiers, and Infidels. 23

The alarm that Stewart addresses are the trigger words “Fouriers, Anti-Renters, … infidels.” These words are used as scare tactics and can be compared to the use of socialism or fascism today. Whether or not the term holds merit and meaning in a conversation they do act as hot button words to discount the

22 Stewart, 71.

23 Stewart, 7.
remainder of the argument. It is significant that Zabriskie used the term “infidels” and it was important enough for Stewart to repeat it. Infidels was used as a term to those who opposed Christianity, commonly used to reference Muslims. The understanding of Islam and usage of the term infidels was not only based on their national climate, but also global climate on the relations with the Ottoman empire. Zabriskie was using the term “infidel” in his argument as a scare tactic but was not imagining enslaved people to be among the same population that he referred to as infidels because as Beydoun explained Muslim identity was viewed as separate from Black identity. Both attorneys made references to Islam unaware of the fact that there may have been enslaved persons in the courtroom who believed in Islam even if they were unable to practice their faith.

In my research, I was unable to find the fate that Mary, her mother, and William faced. Despite Stewart’s impassioned speech, slavery in New Jersey would remain legal until 1846 and those enslaved would become indentured servants for the remainder of their lifetime. While this case does not give information on those enslaved it does provide valuable context to the importance of religion in the court system and the acceptance of it in conversation. Stewart was held in very high regard and his speech was praised even by the opposing counsel. This was affirmed by the statement in the document:

“The scene was quite impressive. The auditory was numerous and highly respectable, and such was the impressiveness with which the closing appeal of the advocate for freedom was delivered, that no one seemed to

24 Finkelman, 152.
like to be the first to break the spell his eloquence had cast upon the assembly.  

Thus, his focus and assertion of Christianity did not discount his argument or weaken it. Today religion is often removed from conversation and academia to favor facts. But Stewart viewed faith as a guide and standing side by side with the tenants of the Constitution. This establishes the importance of religion and just like Christianity informed the lives of these attorneys and most in the United States at the time, Islam was the guiding principle for many enslaved people and was intangible and they could hold faith in their hearts whether they found ways to practice physically or not.

Although religion was often erased from enslaved people’s identity, as evidenced by this example the courtroom was not void of religion as Christianity was the center of the ethical argument. The judicial system was largely built on principles present in the Christian faith and conversation on the interpretation of the laws for years after, and arguably still in the present, rely on a Christian lens. The irony of the situation is that while Christianity is so present in the social sphere, it is ignored in ways that allow the continuation of the dehumanization of other people for profit. The importance of the Christian religion was held on a pedestal, but the ability and choice for those enslaved were restricted as Stewart emphasizes with his reference to the Pharaoh. God was present in the constitution and in the courtroom, but the enslaved were prohibited to know God and believe in God because they cannot have the same liberties as the white

25 Stewart, 82.
man. Islam as a religion prohibits enslavement in the sense of exploitation and abuse of any persons because no one is to be completely obeyed or worshipped except God. However, in the historical sense Muslim majority countries did have slavery and it was not outlawed until the nineteenth century. Fair and humane treatment was encouraged and as Diouf explains, the African system of slavery was such that it was "impossible to distinguish (slaves) from free men." The social conditions of slavery were similar to servants, yet despite any difference in social status mistreatment was prohibited. This is opposite to the system of cruelty of enslavement in the United States where mistreatment was even encouraged among enslavers to ensure obedience.

The historical story of Bilal, a Black man that was enslaved in Mecca, is a prominent story in Islam. He was publicly pinned down as a giant rock was placed on his chest and he was told to denounce God. Bilal continued to say "ahad" meaning one for the oneness of God and proclamation of his faith in Islam. Upon seeing this cruel and inhumane situation, Abu-Baker al Siddiq who was one of the closest companions of the Prophet Mohammad (PBUH), paid for the freedom of Bilal. His endurance of the pain, but also resistance to be silent on his beliefs was a moving story that earned him praise; he became a significant figure in Islam as he would become one of the closest companions of the Prophet and the first person to call the Athan. Bilal and versions of his name and Abu-Baker would be the names of two well-known enslaved Muslims.

26 Diouf, 27.
These stories of resistance and belief in God are powerful. Strength and courage come from hearing other stories and having faith. Stories of resistance and firmness in faith are commonly told to even young children in West Africa as literacy was very important. Qur'anic schools were a staple and prestigious in West Africa that were co-ed and even attended by non-Muslims. The stress on literacy meant that many Muslims who became enslaved were literate.\textsuperscript{27} They were equipped with knowledge of their faith and the Qur'an; the importance and relevance of this knowledge among enslaved Muslims have been largely ignored. Beydoun explains the gap in religious understanding stating,

"Legal commentators have discussed the Bible's role in inspiring slave revolts, which drove the latter Antebellum Era debates about whether to Christianize slaves. However, Islam's role in spurring rebellion has largely gone untreated by these legal commentators."\textsuperscript{28}

The stripping of faith was a part of the process to ensure there was no sense of hope and no sense of community existed and to ensure obedience. When people are empowered with stories of triumph and resistance, they are empowered to claim their freedom whether through revolt or in the courtroom.

The significance of Stewart's speech in this court case is that it provides an understanding of the cultural understanding of religion and Islam in that room. Stewart would not make obscure references or references to things that would be misunderstood by the judges. His speech was very well-received and praised.

\textsuperscript{27} Diouf, 24.
\textsuperscript{28} Beydoun, 191.
which gives a strong sense of the importance of Christianity, but also the acknowledgment of references to Islam. Court cases when unable to provide information about individuals can provide a sense of the climate in the state and a better picture of cultural understandings of the environment around them. Stewart is a well-known abolitionist lawyer and referenced in many papers, but I found no mention of his understanding of Islam or approach to religions in the courtroom. His speech is cited as significant and impassioned, but there was never a mention of his approach to faith. In addition, Mary who is mentioned in the case is a very common name in both Christianity and Islam as Mary is recognized in both faiths as the mother of Jesus. In the Quran, a whole chapter is dedicated to Mary known as Mariam. Mary Tebout may have been Muslim or have ancestors in her lineage. Further research could reveal her parents’ names or other connections to Islamic names. However, when court cases are only regarded for the laws and outcomes a lot of valuable information is ignored that exists in the transcripts of the court cases. The analysis of this court case reveals the potential information court cases hold regarding the understanding of Islam and the representation of enslaved Muslims.
Section II:

Scholarship has been negligent around the history of enslaved Muslims; therefore, it is difficult to find primary sources or collections that are dedicated to the documentation around this history. Beydoun states:

Research indicates that the Muslim slave population could have been as high as 1.2 million. Despite their considerable presence in the Antebellum South, the history of Muslim slaves has been largely neglected within legal scholarship. This Article argues that the omission of Muslim slaves from legal scholarship is a consequence of the legal segregation of Black and Muslim identity during the Antebellum Era.

A way to reckon with this lack of scholarship is to dig into the legal system, notably the records available from the court system. Building on his argument, legal segregation has caused historians to dismiss or look over court documents as a source of information on Black enslaved Muslims. They have discounted the value of identifying Muslims, but it can provide valuable information to heritage and culture as well as beginning to establish familial connections.

My approach to researching court documents was to first establish a list of names that were documented in other sources as names of enslaved Muslims. For example, Omar Ibn Said was famously known as the enslaved Muslim who wrote his autobiography in Arabic. The Library of Congress has a whole collection dedicated to his works including a portrait of him. Omar Ibn Said was

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29 Beydoun, 144.
also known as Uncle Moreau a name that would not be identified as Muslim. In this example I would note Omar Ibn Said, also known as Moreau, in my growing list, but also “Omar”, “Said”, and “Ibn” as separate entries. In Arabic Omar and Said are both common first names, and “ibn” means son. The importance of the documentation of names as a whole and in parts like “ibn” creates a list of keywords that can indicate a connection to Islam. This aided me in my research through various documents and court cases. I have also supplemented this list with names that stood out to me because of my knowledge of Arabic and Islam.

It is interesting to note that some names have no connection to nicknames or aliases like the Arabic name Bilali as “Tom”. In the example of Omar, “Moreau” is derived from the French word “more” which means “dark skinned”, and it sounds like Moors. Alternative names are important to note, especially when the same individual can be referenced in different places by different names or even different names within the same source. In other cases, persons identified as Muslim have children with names that have no connection to Arabic names nor common West African names. For example, Salih Bilali’s daughter was named Margaret; her name has no connection to Islam as it stands alone. Yet, it was documented that she always attempted to wear a hijab or headscarf. By

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32 Farooq, 18.
establishing a record her descendants can be traced back to Salih Bilali and a connection to Islamic heritage even if there is no documentation on the practice of religion. If my time and resources allowed, I would have begun to develop family trees with information found among the court cases. Regardless of how small the family tree and connections might be, it establishes a start to valuable information that can be developed to further connections between enslaved people. It must also be noted that the indication of an Arabic or Muslim name is not a claim that each person was a practicing or devout Muslim, but rather that this name was held within the enslaved community and passed on. Within the United States, a name like Omar and Fatima would not have just been given to an enslaved person by accident. A name is a claim to identity. It is a piece of Muslim heritage or lineage that was able to survive through generations.

Unfortunately, given the restrictions of the pandemic, many archives were closed. This also meant they were backed up with requests and it takes weeks or even months to receive a response. If I had more time and access the archives, I would have gone to the National Archives in Philadelphia which holds a large collection of court cases that they are still in the process of digitizing. Using the list of names I compiled, I would also search within advertisements of enslaved people and newspapers mentioning runaway slaves. The slaves identified in court cases could also be cross-referenced with the dates and location of slave ledgers/plantation records. Below is the table from the names I have compiled that continues to grow.
### Names of Enslaved Muslims

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Also Known As</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abdali</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abu Bakr</td>
<td>Bubacar</td>
<td>Arabic, companion of Prophet Mohammad (PBUH)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bocarrey</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ahmad</td>
<td>Homady</td>
<td>Arabic,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Amadi</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hammett</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hamid</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alik</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Almansour(^{33})</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ayuba bin</td>
<td>Job Ben Solomon(^{34})</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sulayman</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bakary(^{35})</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biliali</td>
<td>Bullaly(^{36})</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ben Ali(^{37})</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bailey(^{38})</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fatima (f)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ibrahim</td>
<td>Bram</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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\(^{33}\) Farooq 16  
\(^{34}\) Gomez 673  
\(^{35}\) Farooq 16  
\(^{36}\) 685  
\(^{37}\) 689  
\(^{38}\) Gomez, 699.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gomez, 688.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Gomez, 690.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gomez, 689.</td>
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<td>Gomez, 685.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gomez, 688.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Gomez, 710.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farooq, 20.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Gomez, 690.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gomez, 685.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gomez, 689.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Gomez, 688.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gomez, 688.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeffray(^{39})</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kider(^{40})</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lahamin Jay(^{41})</td>
<td>Fulbe, “second son”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lamin Kaba</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sambo(^{42})</td>
<td>Fulbe, “second son”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tom(^{43})</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mamado(^{44})</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muhammad</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Mahomet</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homady</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hommady(^{45})</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moosa</td>
<td>Arabic, name for Prophet Moses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mousa</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muss</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mustapha</td>
<td>Muss</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wali</td>
<td>Walley(^{46}) Arabc, saint or holy man</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yarrow Mahmud</td>
<td>Yarrow Mamout</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yasin(^{47})</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{39}\) Gomez, 688.  
\(^{40}\) Farooq, 20.  
\(^{41}\) Gomez, 690.  
\(^{42}\) Gomez, 685.  
\(^{43}\) Gomez, 689.  
\(^{44}\) Gomez, 685.  
\(^{45}\) Gomez, 688.  
\(^{46}\) Gomez, 710.  
\(^{47}\) Farooq, 16.
The following is a selection of cases I was able to identify as involving enslaved Muslims. Let us begin with the case of *Abram (a man of color) v. Johnson*, September 1858. Abram is an enslaved man; his name can either be a version of Abraham or Ibrahim. As Mustafa Amin Farooq explains

“Some Muslim slaves attempted to answer to more than one name, which assists historians examining primary records. A notice for an escaped slave in Georgia named him as, ‘a new Negro Fellow, called Jeffray, sometimes, BRAM, or IBRAHIM’ “48

As noted earlier the aliases of enslaved people did not necessarily have a connection with their actual names. Ibrahim is certainly closer to Abraham than Jeffray, but as the notice suggests Jeffray was the name appointed to him while Bram is most likely a nickname to Ibrahim that he is referred to among his own formed community. This reinforces the importance of identity and significance of the names that enslaved people held onto.

The case of *Abram (a man of color) v. Johnson* is dated 1858 and occurred in Tennessee. At this time in the state, the enslaved population grew 15% between 1850 and 1860; there were over 250,000 enslaved people in the state.49 The production of cotton was a contributing factor to this as it was very profitable and enslaved people were the source of labor to produce. The details of the case are substantial because Abram, despite being an enslaved man, is the plaintiff. He has come to court in a “bill for his freedom.” There are parts of

48 Farooq, 16.
the case excluded from this source. It is also stated that this trial is a follow-up from a previous one, but that the courts had lost a record of it. It is unclear how the case was brought to the court in the first place or how an enslaved man was able to petition for his freedom in the court of law. The court document also states that the defendant, Johnson “was the clerk of the County Court of Claiborne, and there are strong reasons for believing that a faithful record of the action of the Court upon the petition was not kept.” This suspicion allowed for the case appeal to be considered.

The final decision of the court was stated as follows, “The complainant must be sent to the Western Coast of Africa, and a decree for his freedom will be drawn upon the terms and conditions laid down in the act of the 24th of February, 1854.” Additionally, Johnson would be responsible to pay for the costs. The reference to West Africa is another indication that he may be Muslim and as established before West African countries were dominantly Muslim.

The case of Abram was in 1858, well into the establishment of the United States as an independent nation. There were cases predating the Declaration of Independence, however, they are still very crucial in the histories of enslaved people in the United States because the culture of America and system of slavery began in the landscape and continued to develop as the colony went

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through political changes. The further back the information can point to, the more information can be uncovered on identities that can connect to form lineages.

One early case was the case of Abda in Connecticut dated February 1702. This same year the General Court enacted a statute that required enslavers who manumitted their slaves to be responsible for the costs if the enslaved became destitute. This law was created to prevent enslavers from abandoning elder enslaved people who could not work anymore, but it created a fear of the costs and finances that may be involved when freeing any enslaved person. Therefore, its effect lowered the manumission of enslaved people and prevented even those who wanted to free those young and skilled. It is unclear whether this law or the case of Abda came first. This case involves a “writ of arrest upon the body of a mallatta servant.”52 The case information states that the court will have a hearing to discuss the petition for Abda, who is Mr. Thomas Richards of Hartford’s slave. 53 In documents from the Hartford Connecticut State Library, titled “Miscellaneous Papers, 1635-1789,” there was more information on this case under the heading “Abda, mulatto, Hartford controversy over being held a slave.”54 In the judicial review, it says a “mallatta servant” implying Abda as a female. In Arabic, “Abda” means “slave” in the feminine form and “Abd” is “slave” in the masculine form. “Slave” in strictly the Islamic sense and not political or

52 Catterall, 419.

53 Catterall, 419.

54 “Miscellaneous Papers, 1635-1789, Index.”
cultural context is used for all of humanity. People are created to worship God and obey his command and thus everyone is a slave of God. In Christianity, because Jesus is part of the trinity – the father, son, and holy spirit- people are the children of God. The Islamic faith however believes in Jesus (Issa) as a prophet of God like Adam, Moses, and Muhammad; Jesus and all of the prophets are also slaves of God. For this reason, many names include “Abd” as a prefix followed by one of the ninety-nine names that God is referred to in Islam. For example, Abdallah (Abdullah) means “slave of Allah” and Abdel-Kareem “slave of The Generous.” In this case, Abda can be a shortened version of any of these names as the spelling of the prefix “Abdel” varies including “Abdul” or “Abdal.”

The information in the “Miscellaneous Papers” states that there was a warrant issued for the arrest and return of Abda to Thomas Richards in February 1702/3. Then on Mar.2, 1702/3 there is a copy of the warrant served to Thomas Richards to “answer for unjust holding of Abda.” Thomas’ father passed and he wanted to claim Abda as his own property, but Abda claimed he was free after the death of Thomas’ father and filed a countersuit for unjustly keeping him for a year. Abda’s mother Hannah Duce stated that he is the son of John Jennings and this was an additional reason for Abda to claim his freedom given his English


blood. However, this is denied and it is stated that the child follows the condition of the mother. Abda claimed his freedom in the court of law despite all the obstacles. It is significant that he was able to petition for his freedom and important to note that even a warrant was issued for Thomas Richards for detaining Abda. He ultimately was unable to secure his freedom, but this historical account of his resilience and efforts to claim his freedom in the court system is substantial.

In a similar case also in Connecticut in July 1710, Rogers v. Hagar, James Roger insisted Hagar was his property after the passing of his grandfather. Rogers claimed that Hagar and her children belonged to him; however, she refused and stated that she and her children had been freed. It was stated that Hagar and her children would remain free until the case could be reviewed and a decision determined.\textsuperscript{57}

The indication of a connection of this case to Islam is the name Hagar. In Islam, Hagar is a revered woman and is the wife of Abraham (Ibrahim) and Mother to the Prophet Ismail. Although Hagar is also important in Christianity and Judaism, the name was not common in the colony at the time of the case and Judaism was not really present in West African countries at the time. It is very probable that Hagar was a Muslim or descended from a Muslim family, one that lived in a community, listening to the Athan (prayer calls) five times a day. Their culture would be influenced by the practices of Islam and informing the world they lived in and the society they interacted with. Yet in 1710, Hagar was in a

\textsuperscript{57} Catterall, 419.
land far from where her ancestors lived and she stood in a court of law advocating for her freedom and the freedom of her children.

The examples of these court cases can provide insight into the different experiences enslaved people had when they attempted to gain their freedom. It offers different historical accounts of experiences in different states and time periods in America. Names that are outliers for the time period in the United States can be indicators of names that are significant to specific African heritages or religions, including Islam. Other names are clearly connected to Islam or the Arabic language as is the case with the name Abda. A more critical and careful observation of court documents can provide a window into the existence and presence of enslaved Muslims in America. This resource in conjunction with other primary data can help establish new literature.
Section III:

It is valuable to look at ways that a database of enslaved Muslim names can be used and built upon. In Amir N. Muhammad’s book *Unique Tombstone Found Across the United States*, the documents different symbols he finds on tombstones most notably a hand carving with one finger pointed upward. In Islam, the shahada is the proclamation of faith that there is no God but Allah and Muhammad is his slave and last messenger. When this statement is said in prayer, Muslims will point their index finger on their right hand up. This carving thus denotes a Muslim identity of the person that has passed. Amir Muhammad explains in his foreword the story of two well-known enslaved Muslims, Salih Bilali and Bilali Muhammad. They were both entrusted with many responsibilities on the plantation. In 1813, they both led an army of eighty enslaved men to defend the Sapelo Island of Georgia from the English and the majority of the enslaved were probably Muslim given the extensive presence of Islam in the area. In this same area is the Butler Plantation cemetery for the people enslaved by Pierce Butler a well-known enslaver of the time. He would become infamous from the writings of his wife, Fanny Kemble, who was a British activist and abolitionist. Her writings are also a point of interest that could potentially provide information relative to the identities of the enslaved people she interacted with. It is in the Butler Plantation cemetery that Muhammad found the first


59 Gomez, 701.
tombstone with the shahada symbol. As he collected images of these
tombstones he found “the one finger being used by enslaved men and women
and even by some African-Americans of second and third generations.”60 The
tombstones were found across a range of different dates and names.

Muhammad also states that “in the states of Massachusetts, Rhode Island,
and Connecticut is where I found some of the earliest tombstones dating back to
the 1650s along with many Revolutionary War heroes' tombstones, and
monuments.”61 One tombstone document was that of Sambo Swift found in
Darien, Georgia who lived from 1811-1884.62 This was a common name among
enslaved people. Michael Gomez in “Muslims in Early America” provides context
around the name stating:

A good example is "Sambo," a corruption of the name Samba (meaning
"second son" in the language of the Fulbe, an ethnicity spread throughout the
West African savanna) … The connections among "Sambo," Islam, and the
Fulbe become more apparent when the preceding advertisement is
juxtaposed with another notice in which a decidedly Muslim name is identified
with the same ethnicity… While the association between the name "Sambo"
and Islam is strong in the preceding examples, it does not at all follow that the
name was the exclusive property of Muslims. Rather, it is more reasonable to
conclude that a significant number of African-born males with this name may
have been Muslim.

60 Muhammad, 4.
61 Muhammad, 4.
62 Muhammad, 20.
The name alone “Sambo Swift” would not denote a Muslim as Gomez explains. However, the indication of the shahada on the tombstone does indicate the identity of Islam. An understanding of names and origins is an important tool and partnered with other documents, including court cases, can create a database of different information that can provide missing pieces to historical puzzles. The record the tombstones leave in conjunction with other records can assist in a growing methodology and strategy to uncover identities and information about enslaved Africans.

Enslaved: Peoples of Historical Slave Trade is an online database that has been expanding and growing. It collects information from varied sources and states, “We are building a robust, open-source architecture to discover, connect, and visualize 600,000 (and growing) people records and 5 million data points.” The project aims to build a tool that can identify the names of those enslaved and the stories and biographies of individuals that are available. This is a significant database that continues to grow through collaborative efforts led by the Matrix: Center for Digital Humanities & Social Sciences at Michigan State University. This database is not limited to the United States, it encompasses information from North and South America, Africa, and Western Europe, from the early fifteenth century to final slave emancipation in Brazil, in 1888.  

63 “Enslaved: Peoples of the Historical Slave Trade.” [https://enslaved.org/projectHistory/](https://enslaved.org/projectHistory/).

64 “Enslaved: Peoples of the Historical Slave Trade.” [https://enslaved.org/projectHistory/](https://enslaved.org/projectHistory/).
was restricted to cases in the United States; however, it is important to note that enslaved Muslims would have also been present among these other countries.

Using this database, I used the names I had collected as keywords to search the archive for more information. My initial search of “Muslim” yielded 3 results - Job ben Solomon Jallo, Abu Bakr al-Siddiq, and Mahommah Gardo Baquaqua. When I search Salih Bilali his name is available in the database, but he is not listed as Muslim. The search for “Fatima” yielded 62 results, but none of them appeared in the search for “Muslim”. The database can be improved and strengthened by updating the information for known Muslims in the existing database. The entries can be grown with the information that is found through court cases and documents. Religion is an important indicator and data point that can be very helpful in the expansion of databases. It can help clarify information and allow for more connections to be drawn with the information given.

An example of how scholars can pull on these threads to find information is the interview of Cornelia Bailey. Michael Gomez was able to connect with Cornelia who is the great-granddaughter of Salih Bilali. Gomez states that the interview provided, “the contours of Muslim life in early Georgia-prayer mats, prayer beads, veiling, head coverings, Qur’ans, dietary laws, and ritualized, daily prayer characterized the lifestyle. The composite picture is consistent with a serious pursuit of Islam.”

Where documents might fail to provide certain aspects of understanding and knowledge on enslaved Muslims, oral history may

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65 Gomez, 698.
provide missing links and stories. There is still a living history and memory that still exists because relative to history, the history of the enslaved is not ancient. Familial connections that can be identified and tied to living relatives can lead to interviews that create a repository for the oral history that is still available in this time period.

While there are lots of ways scholarships can grow and form new understandings from the creation of databases around enslaved Muslims, other scholarship needs to be edited to include the presence of Islam as a central thesis. This gap is especially evident in the case of Amistad. In 1839 the slave ship, Amistad, left Cuba for Puerto Principe along the route the enslaved people on the ship revolted and took control of the ship. They spared the lives of Captain Ruiz and Montez and ordered them to steer them back to the coast of Africa, but the captains took the Amistad to the United States. This resulted in a court case as to whether the ship and the Africans on board were the property of Spain and would need to be sent back as per the United States’ treaty with Spain, or the Africans were free and to be sent back to Africa. The case eventually reached the Supreme Court where it was decided that the Africans on board were free to go back home and were not the property of Spain.66

The story of the slaves’ revolt on the ship has gained significant recognition, including a movie starring Matthew McConaughey as the attorney, Roger Sherman Baldwin. Yet the scholarship and materials written on this case exclude

the significance that the people on the ship were Muslim. Sometimes it is mentioned and other times disregarded as a fact. It is not a central thesis nor are the historical analyses crafted to include this important principle. However, the leader of the rebellion is often cited, Sengbe Pieh also known as Joseph Cinque.

Cinque’s leadership and courage are cited in his testimony in court, but his faith as a Muslim is ignored. As Mustafa Farooq explains there was evidence in the court case surrounding the identities of other men on the ship as Muslim, but it was glossed over. Farooq states,

while it was clear that the crew of the Amistad were Muslim, and that their faith had some impact on their lives, the extensive court records on the Amistad, as well as the extraordinary scholarly work on the subject, has managed to reveal little on the impact that Islam had on these slaves. What are left are scraps of testimony by the slaves that can be cobbled together by the conjecturing legal historian into a semi-coherent narrative about the faith of the Mende Muslims.

The scholarship on Islam and the case of the Amistad is certainly lacking. However, with growing databases and a shift to scholarly dialogue with Africanists, it can reveal more information on the Mende Muslim in Africa in context with the information available on enslaved Mende Muslims in the United States. To reiterate Beydoun’s argument, “Islam's role in spurring rebellion has largely gone untreated by these legal commentators.”

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67 Farooq, 25.
68 Beydoun, 191.
because it is unimportant or unimpactful. However, it is a disregard of Islam as significant or necessary in the context of understanding revolts like in the case of the Amistad. Christian reference in the courtroom would not have gone unnoticed and scholarship does address the significance of Christianity and the at times tension with faith and the system of slavery.

Muslims spurring rebellion was a real fear among enslavers and colonizers in the regions where Muslims lived. This fear perhaps aided in the suppression and dismissal of Islam; purposefully erasing it by not making mention of it and forbidding meetings and congregation. Enslaved Muslims sparking rebellions was a concern enough for enslavers to want to prohibit Islam and not mention it, even in courtrooms. Beydoun states, “Islam’s role in spurring rebellion has largely gone untreated by these legal commentators, although social science has vividly illustrated how it functioned as a, "[P]retense for insurgent activity and . . . a source of moral justification for the uprising itself."

Islam was a source of faith and confidence for many to lead rebellion and fight for their freedom. This fear could be a central hypothesis to certain restrictions around congregation for enslaved peoples and lack of mention of Islam in courtrooms.

All these things together point to the necessity of giving a place to Islam and identifying people who were Muslim. It not only provides more context, reference, and background, but also the lack of it discounts the importance of religion during the time of the slave trade and the global climate. In truth, religion

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69 Beydoun, 191.
still heavily informs politics and public platforms and in the United States, including the many politicians that market themselves to appeal to Christian voters. The analysis of court documents in conjunction with other databases and information can uncover a better understanding of enslaved Muslims in the United States and elevate historical analyses.
Conclusion:

Stories are an important part of history, but often only pieces of stories remain in the archives. Saidiya Hartman is a pioneer in the revolution of history and how it is told. In *Wayward Lives. Beautiful Experiments*, she uses the historical records and materials she has to “recreate the voices and use the words of these young women when possible and inhabit the intimate dimensions of their lives.”

Hartman’s work denies the notion that these stories are lost forever by documenting history in this creative and accessible way. Writing that could not have been done by any historian; work that was necessary to be done by a person of color.

Another publication by Hartman is *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route*. In this book, she also reconstructs the stories of historical figures to convey the importance of the lives of the enslaved and their individuality. Elizabeth Schmidt’s review in the New York Times of Hartman’s work cites that Hartman’s main focus is “shaking up our abstract, and therefore forgettable, appreciation for a tragedy wrought on countless nameless, faceless Africa.” The dismissal and erasure of slavery are not due to the lack of historical information, but lack of diligence and attention to these stories. Hartman’s

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approach converts the stories from nameless and abstract histories to imaginable historical narratives that create a better understanding of these stories. In this sense, the formation and establishment of an archive on enslaved Muslims can help build a foundation to tell a historical narrative in the same spirit and care of Hartman’s work.

A gap in historical understanding and analysis during one historical time period leads to a gap in that understanding for the following historical moments. The dismissal of Islam as a central thesis and principle of enslaved people in the United States and in the system of American slavery has led to the disregard of Islam when it comes to the history of Black people in America. While the Nation of Islam has received attention for its significance during the Civil Rights Movement, Islam as a faith has not. Malcolm X leaves the Nation of Islam after his journey to Hajj, the Islamic pilgrimage. He becomes more devout in prayer and sees the Nation of Islam as completely divided from the faith. After his passing, Leroi Jones changes his name to Amiri Baraka which is an Arabic name that translates to “prince blessing” or understood as was his intention as “blessed prince.” The significance of Islam in Malcolm X’s life and teachings had a profound and massive impact on the people around him and thus Black revolution.

Movements like the Black Arts Movement and revolutionary efforts had ties that intertwined with spirituality and religion. For example, Black Soul schools were established in an effort to reconnect with African heritage. Among the curriculum of the school was the teaching of Arabic and Swahili. Another
example and critical part of Black history that has been argued to have
closest and critical parts of Black history that has been argued to have
connections to Islam is Jazz. Sylvianne Diouf has argued that “blues music, one
of the quintessential forms of American culture, can trace its origins to Muslim
influences from the slave era. She also demonstrates how the famous blues
song, “Levee Call Holler,” has a style and melody that comes from the Muslim
call to prayer, the “adhan.” 72 In a few decades, many things shifted among Black
communities in the United States, but it is the effects of centuries of history and
circumstances. These examples point to the significance and impact of Islam on
key historical movements including revolutionary social, and cultural moments.
The historical study and analyses of decades in America and their significance
involve key factors that must be addressed or acknowledge regardless of what
the main argument is analyzing. Islam is arguably one of the most important
factors that needs to be addressed in this field but has been almost completely
ignored in mainstream scholarship.

At the conclusion of Michael Gomez’s article, Muslims in Early America, he
notes the significance of Islam in Elijah Muhammad’s life, born Elijah Poole. His
father’s name was Wali which in Arabic means “saint” or “holy man.” Gomez asks
the question of the significance of Wali and if it potentially is an indicator of
enslaved Muslims in his ancestry that more research could uncover. 73 In this

72 “Muslims Arrived in America 400 Years Ago as Part of the Slave Trade and
Today Are Vastly Diverse.” https://theconversation.com/muslims-arrived-in-
amERICA-400-years-ago-as-part-of-the-slave-trade-and-today-are-vastly-diverse-
113168.

73 Gomez, 710.
case, Elijah Muhammad like others would be reclaiming Islam rather than finding it anew, whether or not he was aware of it and regardless of how he interpreted or used the faith. The significance of Gomez using this example is that he points to the potential of information and connections that could be uncovered of significant historical figures. Islam needs to be viewed as an essential thread and factor in the analysis of the history of African Americans in the United States. Gomez states,

“Islam in America never really disappeared but rather underwent a brief hiatus and has reemerged under more appropriate conditions to resume its place as an important aspect of the history of the African experience in America.”

Islam needs to be observed as a linear and consistent presence in America intertwined with the lives of the enslaved in the nation and connecting to the history of Africans in the United States.

Islam is intertwined with the history of Black people in America. The history is intertwined with the lives of the very first Africans that were forced into the Americas in chains. The dismissal and erasure of elements fundamental to their beliefs, notably Islam, results in a lasting disregard of their identities in historical narratives. Beyond the personal histories of enslaved people, the dismissal of Islam provides a partial understanding of history and incomprehensive one. The context of Islam can aid in the understanding of historical moments and elevate scholarly work.

74 Gomez, 710.
Historical documents analyzed from a new lens can provide new information and findings. The significance of building keywords relative to enslaved Muslims is that as more information is digitized and becomes accessible, it can provide scholars with a way to narrow down searches and be aware of what can potentially be indicative of an Islamic connection. It allows for researchers to pull on a thread and form networks no matter how small. As evidenced by the examples of the court cases, pieces of information in the fine print can also provide the location of where enslaved people originate from. In the case of Abram, enough information was known about him and he had enough of an understanding of his culture to want to return to West Africa. Even if the exact country was not specified, this points to a smaller geographic area and one that is dominated by Islam. The attention to Islam is not due to a lack of attention to religion as evidenced by Stewart’s speech in court and the various works commenting on the relevance and importance of the Bible. Acknowledging and giving space for Islam as a factor and variable in the history of enslaved Muslims can allow for more comprehensive and whole scholarly work.
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