

## SlaveVoyages.org: Bringing Research to Everyone

Occasionally, a site will appear online that contains such a remarkable collection of both raw data and insightful analysis that it's worth a much deeper investigation. "Voyages: The Transatlantic Slave Trade Database" is such a site: it contains not only an incredible collection of data and original documents, but also numerous images, essays, maps, and concepts that condense that information into more manageable units. In addition, individuals can not only do their own studies based on the raw data collected over many years by many different researchers, they can improve and enhance the database with their own original research.

The Voyages database is a great example of how scholarship has developed and evolved over the past decade. Ten years ago, as an academic reference librarian with responsibility for maritime history, I eagerly awaited the publication of the first version of this database, on CD-ROM, for a graduate student doing work on the slave trade. Now, an updated version of that CD-ROM product is available online, free to everyone, at <http://www.slavevoyages.org>. The online version includes recently uncovered data about many voyages to South America, none of which had been included in the initial CD-ROM. The site allows anyone to search the entire data set, and view individual researchers' files, regarding nearly 35,000 slavery voyages. In addition, users can contribute to the database itself, by correcting any errors they find and providing additional information about voyages not otherwise represented.

Because of the complexity of this database and the sheer amount of information within it—a given voyage could have dozens of data points associated with it—it can sometimes be a bit challenging to search. At the same time, an individual can create remarkably efficient and powerful searches, locating, for example, only vessels that sailed between any two dates, and that went from,

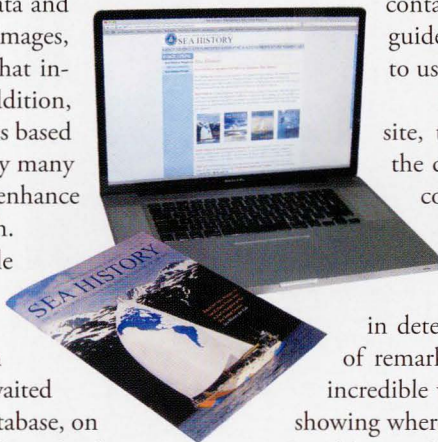
Liverpool to the Caribbean (or any specific port there). Anyone can create a totally unique search of the hundreds of thousands of data points the compilers have collected. One can then highlight any of the resulting voyages and discover everything the database contains regarding a given voyage. An extensive PDF guide helps people understand the database and how to use it, as do demo videos and other tools.

One of the more remarkable aspects of this site, though, is what the authors have done with the data. The "Assessing the Slave Trade" section contains valuable estimates on the true size of the slave trade: records have not survived for most slave voyages, so careful estimates, based on the data presented, are particularly valuable in determining the true size of the trade. A number of remarkable maps provide, in just a few images, an incredible view of the size of the slave trade, particularly showing where most of the slaves came from and were taken to. In addition, the site creators, led by David Eltis and Martin Halbert at Emory University, have built tools that allow users to design customized timelines, graphs, and maps of the portions that interest them.

The site contains the names of over 67,000 slaves carried on these voyages, a remarkable resource in its own right. Another section includes links to a variety of online lesson plans and web resources for educators regarding the transAtlantic slave trade.

Overall, the Voyages site is a fantastic example of how modern academic scholarship can be extended to, and enhanced by, the general public. The web site designers should be commended for not only creating a site from which individuals can view original documents and obtain raw data, but can also easily build complex and meaningful queries that directly address their interests.

Suggestions for column ideas or other sites worth mentioning are welcome at [peter@shipindex.org](mailto:peter@shipindex.org). —Peter McCracken



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