Phase I

The National Endowment for the Humanities awarded Jane Landers of Vanderbilt University, Mariza de Carvalho Soares, of the Universidade Federal Fluminense (Rio de Janeiro, Brazil), and Paul E. Lovejoy, of York University (Toronto, Canada), a two-year Collaborative Research Grant of $150,000 to fund the project entitled “Ecclesiastical Sources and Historical Research on the African Diaspora in Brazil and Cuba.”

After almost three years of intensive work, our joint teams had captured more than 150,000 images, comprising more than 750,000 ecclesiastical records of African and African descended individuals from Brazil, Cuba, and Spanish Florida.

The diverse types of documents preserved include, among others, 16th century black baptisms, marriages, and burials from the Cathedral of Havana, 18th century black wills and testaments from the Diocese of Nova Iguaçu, Brazil, 18th and 19th century black brotherhood records from Brazil and Cuba, and 19th century burials of unbaptized “Asiaticos” in Matanzas, Cuba.

Team members working in Brazil and Cuba created original indexes of the ecclesiastical records in each of the churches in which they worked and provided copies of the indexes and CD-ROMs of all the digitalized records to host churches.

Project collaborators also trained undergraduate, masters, and doctoral students in paleography and basic preservation techniques. These student assistants inventoried parish holdings, cleaned and preserved precious parish registers, digitized images, transcribed selected documents, and produced original research from the records they are helping to save. The Brazil team also produced a CD-ROM on the history and holdings of the churches of the Diocese of Nova Iguaçu.

Vanderbilt University’s Jane and Alexander Heard Library Digital and Unique Collections ensures the preservation of the project’s digital files by storing them on network servers with multiple layers of protection against hardware failure or human error. All files are also copied onto backup tapes and...
stored off-site at the library’s remote storage facility to guard against catastrophic events on campus. The library will migrate the project content forward through changes in technologies and file formats.

**Marshall Breeding**, the former Director for Innovative Technologies and Research at Vanderbilt University, created the project’s web-based interface and metadata, and incorporated additional materials as they were digitized.

During Phase I, team members began constructing databases based on the Cuban records and presented preliminary findings and reports on the project at a variety of domestic and international venues including Brazil, Cuba, Morocco, the United States, and Canada.

## Phase II

Grants from the **British Library Endangered Archives Program** allowed our project to expand to new areas and preserve additional records. Oscar Grandío Moráguez now directs a project to digitize municipal and provincial archives in Cuba, **Pablo F. Gómez** directs a project to digitize notarial records in Quibdó and Buenaventura, Colombia, and **Jane Landers** directs a project to digitize notarial records in La Guajira, Colombia. As the focus of the project expanded it was renamed and is now the Ecclesiastical and Secular Sources for Slave Societies project (ESSSS).

**Courtney J. Campbell** developed the structure for metadata creation and volume descriptions according to ISAD(G) standards. Courtney and **Kara Schultz**, both graduate assistants, are creating additional metadata to allow scholars to more easily search the collection. Researchers can view individual document pages and save transcriptions, notes, and annotations in the database.

Each of the countries whose African history we are tracking still struggles with the legacy of slavery and its political, economic, and social consequences. There is great scholarly and popular interest in African history and heritage in these countries and each modern nation must respond to this interest in defining national identities in multi-cultural societies. The modern nations of the sending areas of West and West Central Africa are equally interested in the discoveries this project is generating.

The ESSSS project is producing and disseminating important new research in the humanities while establishing international facilities and collaborations designed to continue the research beyond the life of the project.

[http://www.vanderbilt.edu/esss/about/history.php](http://www.vanderbilt.edu/esss/about/history.php)
