

## CASE STUDY

# Slavery and Anti-Slavery

Students at Leiden University who study American History and American Slavery love doing research from the *Slavery and Anti-Slavery* digital archive, as it reveals the facts and turns them into researchers.

### THE RESOURCES

*Slavery and Anti-Slavery* is a digital archive in four series devoted to the study and understanding of the history of slavery in America. *Part I: Debates over Slavery and Abolition* is a scholarly collection of approximately 1.5 million pages of primary source documents focussing on the abolitionist movement and the conflicts within it, the anti- and pro-slavery arguments of the period, and the debates on the subject of colonisation. The collection assembles a wide variety of materials – more than 7,000 books and pamphlets, 80 newspaper and periodical titles, and major manuscript collections. Varied sources include well-known journals, private papers, monographs, pamphlets, manuscripts and periodicals that explore the economic, gender, legal, religious, and government issues surrounding the slavery debate.



### ABOUT

Professor Damian Pargas, Professor of American History at Leiden University, specialises in American slavery. He teaches Masters and BA students in North American studies and supervises PhD students on slavery in America, as well as in South America and Europe. Professor Damian Pargas' research interests also include slavery in the Atlantic world and America, research in 19<sup>th</sup> century slavery and African American freedom studies from history and today.

### THE CHALLENGE

Professor Pargas explained the significant challenge of conducting research prior to using the *Slavery and Anti-Slavery* digital archive, "Quite simply, students couldn't do any research here, they would have to go to America and spend money and time in order to do any research."

Professor Pargas was a student himself in 2000 and did his thesis in 2004, for which he had to fly to Washington D.C. and spend the whole of summer conducting research, "The University had a special scholarship to sponsor the costs for students to go to America to access information. Otherwise it was really only privileged students with family in America who were able to do the research."





## IMPACT ON STUDENTS

Professor Pargas' PhD students conducted research on runaway slaves in North America and they used the collections focussed on slavery, abolition and social justice.

Talking about the impact of these resources on his students, Professor Pargas stated, *"Slavery and Anti-Slavery has a lot of source material on America and the Caribbean (it contains court documents, newspapers, government debates and letters). It is a very good source for comparison, for example, studying when slavery and the movement of slaves was abolished across French colonies like Haiti."*

Professor Pargas went on to explain, *"My students are able to research runaway slaves. Using Slavery and Anti-Slavery allows them to look at actual newspaper documents like adverts and announcements from that particular time-period and find out factual information on the subject. For students researching black citizenship, they can look at court documents and find out a wealth of information, that otherwise just wouldn't be available, unless they actually travelled to America."*

*"In the past it took students a year to write a thesis, now it takes less than 6 months. You can research a specific topic with total ease."*

Professor Pargas, also commented that digitising these materials has had significant cost and time saving benefit for students, *"It's cost effective; there is no need to travel and it's time effective too. It's very quick and easy to find the information you need, which you can do remotely and without having to travel to America."*

Professor Pargas has incorporated these resources into his teaching. Here's how his students respond to them, *"For the last half hour of my class I ask students to look at actual material from Supreme Court records and newspapers. For example, I put my students in three groups, and tell them to look at newspapers articles from about 1820 on Washington D.C. runaway slaves."*

*"The first group researches where the slaves went, the second group researches what age the slaves were and the third group looks at the family connections the slaves had."* Professor Pargas went on to say, *"Students love doing research from sources which show them actual facts and it turns them into researchers."*

Continuing to explain how these resources might help attract prospective students and research, Professor Pargas concluded, *"These resources provide us with the ability to do research on slavery and write about it; which has brought a major positive impact to the University and Holland. It attracts a lot of students from within the country and outside. For example, we have a student from Istanbul coming to Leiden University to join a tutorial because they do not have the resources in Turkish universities, and the same student will come again this year to write her thesis with us."*