

Shipmate Networks and Black Identities in the Marriage Files of Montevideo, 1768–1803

Alex Borucki

In 1777, Pedro Antonio, a slave born in Angola, wanted to marry Ana María, a slave born in Rio de Janeiro. Both of them lived in Montevideo, a South Atlantic outpost founded by the Spanish Empire in the Río de la Plata as a defense against the Portuguese. Under the Catholic Church's regulations, Pedro Antonio had to provide evidence of his status as single prior to the marriage ceremony. In front of an ecclesiastical notary who took down his application, Pedro Antonio said that he was single. Then the notary asked two witnesses who had come with Pedro Antonio to substantiate this information. Domingo, a slave from Benguela, Angola, said that he had known Pedro Antonio for six years and that the two of them had come together from Rio de Janeiro to Colônia do Sacramento, a Portuguese town on the Río de la Plata then occupied by the Spanish, and from there to Montevideo. Pedro, the second witness, said that he had known Pedro Antonio for ten years. He had first met Pedro Antonio in Benguela, saw him again in Rio de Janeiro, and finally reencountered him in Montevideo six years prior to the marriage application. This vignette portrays networks that emerged from the slave trade and thus points to the possibility of examining the experiences of generations of Africans and their descendants, as well as the social ties that developed out of these experiences. Marriage files provide a rare window onto the social networks of slaves and freedmen in colonial Montevideo, particularly those ties that emerged from the slave trade.

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In the Catholic Americas, people who wanted to marry had to demonstrate before the church that there were no impediments to their union.¹ The church gathered the evidence provided by those petitioning for marriage in files called *expedientes matrimoniales*. Roughly a month previous to the wedding, the groom—or in the case of some slaves, his master—sought permission to wed by submitting an application. He provided information about himself and his prospective spouse to the ecclesiastical notary, who gathered the facts and completed the file. Then witnesses (*testigos de soltería*) who had previous knowledge of the applicants provided supporting information. Once the file was complete, the parish priest gave public notice of the prospective marriage during the Mass celebration on three successive Sundays before the wedding. Those who had information that would impede the wedding would thus have an opportunity to respond. Marriage files were produced in most Latin American cities where parish records exist.² In colonial Montevideo, marriage files were completed for all people marrying into the city's only parish of the Catholic Church—Spanish, criollos, Africans, Amerindians, and everyone in between—who had been born outside of Montevideo.

These files contain data on the routes Africans took across the Atlantic and the Americas. They indicate the origin of the groom, bride, and witnesses, their shared itineraries, and how these itineraries changed over time. Thus they reveal patterns of geographical mobility and networks created by common experiences among Africans. Marriage files can also be easily quantified, which allows us to track historical trends and patterns. At the same time, each file tells a unique story. A close reading of these stories contextualizes the experiences of slaves in the Catholic Americas and underscores common patterns in such experience in ways that lie outside quantification.

No one has previously employed marriage files systematically to study the routes Africans traveled through the slave trade from Africa to the Americas. Using a handful of these records to analyze geographical mobility in colonial Río de la Plata, Susan Socolow noted the potential of this source for studying

1. Susan M. Socolow, "Acceptable Partners: Marriage Choice in Colonial Argentina, 1778–1810," in *Sexuality and Marriage in Colonial Latin America*, ed. Asunción Lavrin (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1989), 209–50; Patricia Seed, *To Love, Honor, and Obey in Colonial Mexico: Conflicts over Marriage Choice, 1574–1821* (Stanford, CA: Stanford Univ. Press, 1988); Steinar A. Saether, "Bourbon Absolutism and Marriage Reform in Late Colonial Spanish America," *The Americas* 59, no. 4 (2003): 479–81.

2. See *Ecclesiastical and Secular Sources for Slave Societies*, Vanderbilt University, accessed 29 Sept. 2012, <http://sitemason.vanderbilt.edu/ecclesiasticalsources>. I am thankful to David Wheat for the information on this project.

the slave trade from Salvador to Montevideo.³ Herman Bennett employed marriage files in his study of Africans in Mexico during the Iberian Union. While he rightfully considers the links between spouses and witnesses as networks of support within black communities, he argues that African eponyms such as *Mina* tell us little about African origins and routes of enslavement.⁴ Frank Proctor illustrates that both the marriage files and books of several towns in colonial Mexico reflect previous bonds among the enslaved, but he also underlines how marriage patterns and marital networks built new ethnic and community identities.⁵ Finally, Arturo Bentancur analyzed the marriage files of Montevideo between 1790 and 1812 to shed light on the structure of the black family in slavery and freedom. While Bentancur provides the only study of the black family in colonial Montevideo, examining the slave trade and the networks emerging from that experience is beyond the scope of his work.⁶

This article adds to the debate over the relative merits of three major influences in the formation of social networks and black identities in the Americas. One is the shared African backgrounds of slaves; a second is the common experiences of captives during the slave trade; and a third is the development of new social ties in the New World. The marriage files of Montevideo show bonds among free and enslaved Africans emerging from the transatlantic and particularly the intra-American slave trade. Experiences in the slave trade were critical for creating social ties among the Africans who gave testimony in these files. When explaining how they had met the groom, half of all witnesses in the marriage files of slaves told the notary that they had been shipmates in slave vessels or that they had met in other slave ports before arriving in Montevideo.

3. Susan Migden Socolow, "Permission to Marry: Eighteenth-Century Matrimonial Files (Montevideo, 1786)," in *Colonial Lives: Documents on Latin American History, 1550–1850*, ed. Richard Boyer and Geoffrey Spurling (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2000), 236–48.

4. Herman L. Bennett, *Africans in Colonial Mexico: Absolutism, Christianity, and Afro-Creole Consciousness, 1570–1640* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 2003), 79–125. In his most recent book, Bennett asserts that "shared experiences alone could not forge an enduring collective identity" when referring to experiences of Africans before embarkation and during the slave trade. In contrast, he sees Christianity as the main agent of creolization. Herman L. Bennett, *Colonial Blackness: A History of Afro-Mexico* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 2009), 82, 109.

5. Frank T. Proctor III, "*Damned Notions of Liberty*": *Slavery, Culture, and Power in Colonial Mexico, 1640–1769* (Albuquerque: Univ. of New Mexico Press, 2010), 37–67.

6. Arturo Bentancur, "Algunas pautas acerca de la organización familiar de esclavos y libertos en el Montevideo tardocolonial," in *Estudios sobre la cultura afro-rioplatense: Historia y presente*, ed. Arturo Bentancur, Alex Borucki, and Ana Frega (Montevideo, Uruguay: FHCE, 2004), 17–30.

To make this argument for the importance for Africans in Montevideo of social networks forged through the slave trade, I first review the historiography on shipmate networks emerging from the slave trade. Then I analyze the characteristics of expedientes matrimoniales in order to balance both the potential and limitations of these records. Finally, I track the geography that can be drawn from the testimonies of enslaved and free blacks in these files and show how these testimonies cast light on the existence of shipmate networks. These records provide information not only on Africans but also on captives born in the New World, as well as on people of mixed ancestry. I include all these groups in this analysis since all contributed to marriage files of Africans and since the social networks of each were shaped by their shared experiences.

The Social Importance of Associations Formed on Slave Vessels

Historians and anthropologists have long debated the relative importance of African and New World influences on the emergence of black identities in the Americas. The debate was initiated by Melville Herskovits, who stressed how “Africanisms” survived acculturation, and E. Franklin Frazier, who argued that the slave trade had shattered African cultures in the Americas.⁷ In a major contribution to this debate, Fernando Ortiz depicted the emergence of hybrid cultures different from European, Amerindian, or African societies and how transformations affected all individuals in colonial societies through transculturation.⁸ In the years following these debates, scholars studying the British Caribbean noticed the existence of bonds of affection and solidarity among slaves who had shared the Atlantic passage. Using mainly the narratives of slaves’ white contemporaries, Philip Curtin, Elsa Goveia, and Orlando Patterson showed that captives had bonds of friendship both with people from the same ethnolinguistic group as themselves and with shipmates, and that these ties survived for generations.⁹ While these authors did not present a fully artic-

7. Melville J. Herskovits, *The Myth of the Negro Past* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1941); Edward Franklin Frazier, *The Negro Family in the United States* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1939).

8. Fernando Ortiz, *Contrapunteo cubano del tabaco y el azúcar* (1940; Barcelona: Editorial Ariel, 1973).

9. Philip D. Curtin, *Two Jamaicas: The Role of Ideas in a Tropical Colony, 1830–1865* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1955), 26; Elsa V. Goveia, *Slave Society in the British Leeward Islands at the End of the Eighteenth Century* (New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press, 1965), 245; Orlando Patterson, *The Sociology of Slavery: An Analysis of the Origins, Development and Structure of Negro Slave Society in Jamaica* (London: MacGibbon and Kee, 1967), 149–50.

ulated view on this issue, they understood shipmate bonds as an extension of relationships based on origin and kinship.¹⁰

Sidney Mintz and Richard Price put shipmate networks into the central arena of the debates over black cultures in the Americas. Moreover, they attributed greater importance to shipmate bonds as “*cooperative efforts*” than to the cultural traits Africans brought to the Americas for the formation of these black cultures. In their work, the middle passage turns into a crucible of destruction and rebirth where African cultures were weakened and ultimately recast as random patterns of slave trading threw together slaves of wide-ranging origins.¹¹ I disagree with their depiction of slave routes randomly mixing peoples from multiple origins, given that recent scholarship shows a limited number of African ports supplying slaves to a limited number of regions in the Americas; such a pattern created transatlantic slave routes between broad African regions and American destinations.¹² Yet I accept their portrayal of shipmate networks as dyadic bonds among two persons of the same sex. Such ties originated along the lines of gender separation enforced in slave vessels: all cases I analyze here are of men rather than women. Marriage files from Montevideo do not provide information on ties between women, given that the church only requested testimony about the status of grooms. Mintz and Price saw shipmate networks as harbingers of new communities generated by forced displacement, but because their model of creolization downplayed the importance of African origins in the shaping of black identities, it has been largely criticized by recent scholars who highlight the existence of African cultural transferences to the Americas.¹³ These scholars do not necessarily de-emphasize the significance of shipmate networks; rather, they see these ties as overlapping with relationships based on shared African origins and cultures.¹⁴

10. Herbert G. Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750–1925* (New York: Pantheon, 1976), 222.

11. Sidney W. Mintz and Richard Price, *The Birth of African-American Culture: An Anthropological Perspective* (1976; Boston: Beacon Press, 1992), 42–44 (emphasis in original).

12. *Voyages: The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database*, accessed 29 Sept. 2010, <http://www.slavevoyages.org>. (Hereafter referred to as *Voyages Database*.)

13. Mintz and Price, *Birth of African-American Culture*, 48.

14. Walter Hawthorne, “‘Being now, as it were, one family’: Shipmate Bonding on the Slave Vessel *Emilia*, in Rio de Janeiro and throughout the Atlantic World,” *Luso-Brazilian Review* 45, no. 1 (2008): 53–77. For Afrocentric perspectives, see John Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400–1680* (1992; Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1998); Michael A. Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks: The Transformation of African Identities in the Colonial and Antebellum South* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1998); and Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, *Slavery and African Ethnicities in the Americas:*

Rather than looking for African ethnicities in the marriage files, I use ethnicity as a lens to study the transformations of African diasporic communities, as proposed by Paul Lovejoy.¹⁵ He suggests that scholars should analyze how ethnic redefinition occurred in tandem on both sides of the Atlantic by specifying who the Africans were and when they crossed the ocean. The study of shipmate ties raises the possibility of analyzing how African identities changed on the basis of the experience of captives in the slave trade. Africans marrying in Montevideo in the 1770s largely declared provenance from Kongo and Angola, from where they were shipped in the late 1750s and 1760s. Marriage files point to their Christianization long before their forced departure from West Central African slave ports, given that a minority of grooms provided the Christian names of their parents when petitioning to wed in Montevideo. This generation of West Central Africans developed networks with shipmates caught up in the same slave trading routes. They stayed long enough in Montevideo to marry as well as to establish the city's first black Catholic confraternity in 1778 and to command its first black militia in 1780. (However, evidence for the Christianity of West Central Africans arriving in Montevideo disappears from 1784 on, which probably illustrates changing slave trading routes.) Shipmate ties reflected one of the basic shared experiences through which "once these were compared, [enslaved Africans] might discover the basis of renewed or redefined mechanisms and institutions of identity."¹⁶ Shipmate experience emerged as a violent and momentous watershed for captives between their African past and their present in the New World. Shipmate ties provided to West Central Africans a common ground to bridge different aspects of experience such as previous Christianization, African religions, ethnicities, and languages in the Americas.¹⁷

Restoring the Links (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2005). See the response of Price to such Afrocentric critiques in Richard Price, "On the Miracle of Creolization," in *Afro-Atlantic Dialogues: Anthropology in the Diaspora*, ed. Kevin A. Yelvington (Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research Press, 2006), 115–48.

15. Paul E. Lovejoy, "Section Introduction: Methodology through the Ethnic Lens: The Study of Atlantic Africa," in *Sources and Methods in African History: Spoken, Written, Unearthed*, ed. Toyin Falola and Christian Jennings (Rochester, NY: Univ. of Rochester Press, 2003), 107.

16. Paul E. Lovejoy and David V. Trotman, "Introduction: Ethnicity and the African Diaspora," in *Trans-Atlantic Dimension of Ethnicity in the African Diaspora*, ed. Paul E. Lovejoy and David V. Trotman (London: Continuum, 2003), 2.

17. Through internal slave trades, captives sometimes learned other languages or dialects to communicate with slavers and fellow captives. Thus language was both a feature of African origin and a result of the process of enslavement. Early captivity could

Captives from West Central Africa in Brazil used the word *malungo* to describe shipmate networks.¹⁸ As analyzed by Robert Slenes, the term had various connotations as it developed in the diaspora, ranging from *ship* to *mate* and finally to *brother in suffering*. This term had kinship connotations but also expressed West Central African cosmological beliefs, since slaves saw the Atlantic passage as the itinerary from life to death. Captives understood the ocean as the borderland leading to the realm of death, whose crossing meant an all-consuming event during which nobody wanted to be alone.¹⁹ Once in Brazil, captives became aware of cultural affinities that were obscured in Angola by geographical isolation, war, and state formation. The story of the term *malungo* reveals how both internal and transatlantic slave routes affected captives and how people caught in this traffic came to identify themselves as brothers in suffering. This implied the reshaping of kinship and ethnic boundaries to include and ally with strangers against death, oppression, and violence. Concurrent with these general patterns, Walter Hawthorne describes an exceptional case where captives from the slave ship *Emilia* were brought to Rio de Janeiro by the British navy during the period of the illegal slave trade and then managed to return to Lagos.²⁰ These liberated Africans remained in contact while living in Brazil for 15 years. Evidence of shipmate ties among both men and women also emerges from studies on seventeenth-century Mexico and Costa Rica, eighteenth-century Chesapeake and South Carolina, and nineteenth-century Guyana.²¹

therefore modify one of the features modern scholars identify as a cultural marker of origin. Alexander X. Byrd, *Captives and Voyagers: Black Migrants across the Eighteenth-Century British Atlantic World* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 2008), 249–50.

18. Robert W. Slenes, “‘Malungu, ngoma vem!’: África coberta e descoberta no Brasil,” *Revista USP*, no. 12 (1991–1992): 48–67.

19. Rituals of aquatic passage are linked to death, rebirth, and the formation of new identities in the African diaspora discourse on the slave trade. Monica Schuler notices the importance of metaphors based on ship and shipmates in such discourse. Monica Schuler, “Enslavement, the Slave Voyage, and Astral and Aquatic Journeys in African Diaspora Discourse,” in *Africa and the Americas: Interconnections during the Slave Trade*, ed. José C. Curto and Renée Soulodre-La France (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2005), 185, 191, 198.

20. Hawthorne, “‘Being now, as it were.’”

21. Bennett, *Africans in Colonial Mexico*, 100; Russell Lohse, “Africans in a Colony of Creoles: The Yoruba in Colonial Costa Rica,” in *The Yoruba Diaspora in the Atlantic World*, ed. Toyin Falola and Matt D. Childs (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 2004), 130–56; Philip D. Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint: Black Culture in the Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake and Lowcountry* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1998), 78, 448–49; Monica

Recent scholarship reintroducing violence and displacement in the shaping of black identities in the Americas underlines the importance of experiences in slave ships, in addition to considering shipmate networks as part of the strategies of the enslaved.²² Such scholarship incorporates the enhanced knowledge of slave trade patterns, highlights African agency in this traffic, and generates renewed insights on how terror shaped the history of slaves. In other words, we now know more about how violence shaped social networks and transformed the identities through which slaves made sense of their changing world. To rephrase the insights of some of these new scholarly contributions, the slave vessel was a “non-community” in African terms, a group of strangers separated from their kin and references who, while sharing certain affinities with some others on board, were nevertheless isolated as a group. At the same time, the slave ship was a new community, emerging from the hardships of New World slavery, where Africans created shipmate networks. Both the studies highlighting the importance of experiences in the slave ship and the new knowledge of the transatlantic and African internal slave trade point to continuities and ruptures in social networks and identities. On the one hand, slave trade itineraries, shaped by demand for labor in the New World, trading networks, and Atlantic winds, set common patterns for slave experience within African and American geographies. On the other hand, people caught up in the slave trade understood only disjointed pieces of the broader Atlantic enslavement that they used to make sense of their own story. The present study shows that shipmate networks and broadly shared experiences within the slave trade were influential when free and enslaved African men had to select trustworthy associates in Montevideo. A common African provenance was also important. Thus it is not helpful to privilege any one factor—African backgrounds, slave trade experiences, or New World developments—over the others; rather, these should be treated as mutually reinforcing elements in the development of distinctive black identities over time.

Schuler, “Liberated Central Africans in Nineteenth-Century Guyana,” in *Central Africans and Cultural Transformations in the American Diaspora*, ed. Linda M. Heywood (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2002), 326.

22. Byrd, *Captives and Voyagers*, 8–9, 46–51, 248; Stephanie E. Smallwood, *Saltwater Slavery: A Middle Passage from Africa to American Diaspora* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 2007), 118–21, 190–98; Vincent Brown, *The Reaper’s Garden: Death and Power in the World of Atlantic Slavery* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 2008), 45, 74, 117–18; Vincent Brown, “Social Death and Political Life in the Study of Slavery,” *American Historical Review* 114, no. 5 (2009): 1231–49; Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey along the Atlantic Slave Route* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007), 225; Marcus Rediker, *The Slave Ship: A Human History* (New York: Viking, 2007), 265, 283, 305–7.

Marriage files allow us to analyze how Africans chose who could speak about their past. In these records, the church asked free and enslaved Africans about their companions' past. People whom applicants knew in their present lives thus reconstructed narratives of their past. The slave trade loomed large in these narratives, but it was not the only factor shaping their present. This request for witnesses came at a specific moment: marriage into the church. While this article neither delves into family construction nor African Christianity, it is worth noticing that family ties and corporate bodies were the most important elements in social networks in colonial Latin America. After much forced movement and oppression, Africans expected some protection through marriage, given that the church generally impeded the separation of spouses by slave sales. Apart from dyadic shipmate ties, simply staying for a sufficient amount of time in a single place could strengthen additional social networks and further shape identities. Marriage files portray an intersection of past shared experience in the slave trade, present social ties, and future possibilities for local black communities. They reflect both how people understood who they were as participants in various networks and, to a large extent, the processual construction of identities by shared experiences. In summary, this article shows how lifelong shipmate ties were keystones in the creation of collective black identities for generations of Africans who lived in a slave trading port of the Americas. As these networks fleshed out the memories of those forced to cross the Atlantic, they provided coherence to the disjointed experiences of Africans in the New World.

Marriage Files of Montevideo, 1768–1803

While most of the historiography has shown shipmate networks through microhistories or narrative descriptions, this article uses statistical analysis to show social ties emerging from the slave trade within an entire city.²³ For this

23. The word *malungo*, discussed earlier, was not unknown in Montevideo by 1830. Newspaper articles included this term when reporting the “voice” of Africans celebrating the laws prohibiting the slave trade and freeing newborn children of slaves while at the same time complaining about the continuance of slave traffic. In this context, *malungo* meant *friend* and had no connection with shipmates. The incorporation of this word into newspapers indicates both its usage by Africans in Montevideo and that white men caught at least part of its meaning. *El Indicador* (Montevideo), 13 Oct. 1831, p. 3. Francisco Acuña de Figueroa wrote one of these pieces: see *El Universal* (Montevideo), 27 Nov. 1834, p. 3. Néstor R. Ortiz Oderigo, *Diccionario de Africanismos en el Castellano del Río de la Plata* (Buenos Aires: Eduntref, 2007), 135.

study, I entered in a Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) database all marriage files for Africans and their descendants in Montevideo from 1768 to 1803: 431 cases, for an average of 12 files per year. The total number of people involved in those files, including spouses and witnesses, constitutes a representative sample of the African and African-descended population living in the city. In 1778, approximately 1,300 free and enslaved blacks and coloreds lived in Montevideo, accounting for 29 percent of the total population. Between 1768 and 1779, marriage files provide data on 377 individuals of full or mixed African ancestry—nearly 30 percent of the city's black and colored population.²⁴ The nature of this source did change over time, which affects its representativeness. From 1727 to 1767, during Montevideo's first 40 years of existence, there were 61 weddings involving at least one African or person of mixed origin. Forty-eight of these took place between 1754 and 1767, at a rate of less than four weddings per year. Only after 1768 do the marriage files show the black and colored presence in the city to have been growing. From this year to 1799, there were between 5 and 22 marriage files each year for free and enslaved blacks and coloreds. Yet between 1799 and 1803, free blacks and slaves almost disappear from the records.

These figures reflect increases in the slave trade to the Río de la Plata as Montevideo developed from an outpost of intra-American slave voyages to a full transatlantic slave trade port in the late eighteenth century. At least 70,000 slaves arrived in Buenos Aires and Montevideo between 1777 and 1812, which is surprising given that Buenos Aires had only 43,000 inhabitants by 1810 and Montevideo had no more than 12,000 by 1803.²⁵ Many of these slaves continued on to markets beyond the Río de la Plata, including Paraguay, Upper Peru, Chile, and Peru. The years 1782 and 1791 were landmark years for the slave trade to this region. First, warfare interrupted all trade between Spain and its colonies beginning in 1779, as the British navy pursued Spanish ships. To counteract this blockade, the Spanish crown allowed Portuguese ships to sail between Spain and the Río de la Plata. The majority of these Portuguese

24. Archivo General de la Nación, Uruguay, Fondo Ex Archivo General Administrativo (hereafter cited as AGN-U, AGA), libro 246, 1778. Marriage records prior to 1768 were published in Juan Alejandro Apolant, *Génesis de la familia uruguaya: Los habitantes de Montevideo en sus primeros 40 años, filiaciones, ascendencias, entronques, descendencias* (Montevideo, Uruguay: Vinaak, 1975).

25. Alex Borucki, "The Slave Trade to the Río de la Plata, 1777–1812: Trans-Imperial Networks and Atlantic Warfare," *Colonial Latin American Review* 20, no. 1 (2011): 81–107; Lyman L. Johnson and Susan Migden Socolow, "Población y espacio en el Buenos Aires del siglo XVIII," trans. Sibila Seibert, *Desarrollo Económico* 20, no. 79 (1980): 333.

ships disembarked slaves illegally in Montevideo, leading to the arrival of more than 5,000 slaves in the city mainly in 1782. Second, a change in metropolitan policies led the Spanish crown to throw open the slave trade to the Río de la Plata in 1791, which increased slave arrivals to the area during the two following decades.

The slave shipments from the early 1780s explain the growth of marriage files for slaves from 1780 to 1791. However, the next 12 years—from 1792 to 1803—saw fewer records at a moment when slave arrivals were at their highest. The sharp decline of marriage files for slaves after 1799 is a paradox. Marriages between slaves account for half of Montevideo's marriage files of blacks and coloreds between 1768 and 1779, and this figure rises to 65 percent from 1780 to 1791. However, from 1799 to 1803 only 38 percent of marriage files involving blacks and coloreds were for marriages between slaves. Slaves thus almost disappeared from the marriage files during this period. The probable explanation for this is that the rapid increase of Montevideo's population led priests and notaries to exempt slaves from the filing process in the early 1800s. Records of nonwhite weddings continued, but marriage files were apparently no longer required for slaves. They continued to marry, since there were nearly 40 weddings between slaves per annum from 1800 to 1812. However, in the first decade of the nineteenth century these marriages yielded only five to ten marriage files for slaves yearly.²⁶ Royal orders prohibiting marriages between "unequal" people increased in the Río de la Plata in 1803–1805, which augmented the work of priests at regulating private life, and this may have led priests to stop keeping marriage files for the growing slave population.²⁷

The richness of information included in marriage files also changed over time. In the case of slaves and free blacks, marriage files for Montevideo commonly contain data on the spouses and the two witnesses who gave testimony related only to the groom, not the bride. When a widow remarried, sometimes a third witness confirmed the death of the previous husband, and thus some information on the wife appears in the files. Each file therefore contains information on four or five people but mostly reveals the networks shared by the groom and his witnesses. However, beginning in the late 1780s there are an

26. Arturo Bentancur believes that after 1800 the ecclesiastical notary just filled a yearly quota of five to ten marriage files for blacks and coloreds and left no records of other wedding petitions for this population. He shows that 92.5 percent of marriage files for slaves between 1790 and 1812 took place in the 1790s. Bentancur, "Algunas pautas."

27. In the Río de la Plata, additional royal orders complemented the *Real Pragmática* (1776) regulating marriage in 1803–1805. See Socolow, "Acceptable Partners"; Bentancur, "Algunas pautas."

Table 1. Information on witnesses in Montevideo's marriage files for blacks and coloreds, 1768–1803

<i>Period</i>		<i>Normal case</i>	<i>No witnesses</i>	<i>No need for witnesses</i>	<i>Total</i>
1768–1779	Count	112	0	0	112
	%	100.0	0.0	0.0	100.0
1780–1791	Count	135	13	20	168
	%	80.4	7.7	11.9	100.0
1792–1803	Count	53	57	41	151
	%	35.1	37.7	27.2	100.0
Total	Count	300	70	61	431
	%	69.6	16.2	14.2	100.0

Source: Archivo del Arzobispado de Montevideo, Expedientes Matrimoniales, 1768–1803.

increasing number of files in which there were no witnesses recorded. In table 1, the *Normal case* column shows files with information on spouses and witnesses. The *No witnesses* column includes files that contain the marriage application and the writing produced by the notary but no witnesses. The last column, *No need for witnesses*, shows cases in which the master reported that one or both spouses had arrived in Montevideo as children, thus obviating the need for witnesses.

The database has information on witnesses in all cases for the first period, in 80 percent of the cases for the middle period, and in 35 percent of the cases for the last 12 years. The first case in which childhood was mentioned as a reason for not providing witnesses comes from 1789.²⁸ Between 1792 and 1803, masters initiated the file by declaring that the slave had arrived in the city as a child (“vino niño a esta ciudad”)²⁹ in almost a third of all cases. In another third of the cases from this last period there was no explanation of why there were no witnesses: the only record is the application initiated by the master or the groom. In these last cases, 25 percent involved free black and colored grooms, not slaves. A change of record keepers does not explain this pattern, as the same parish priest was in charge from 1783 to 1815.³⁰ Thus the testimonies in marriage files became less representative of Montevideo's entire black population as time went on, and for the last 12-year period the marriage files are particularly short of information on slaves.

28. Archivo del Arzobispado de Montevideo, Expedientes Matrimoniales (hereafter AAM-EM), 1789, exp. 4.

29. AAM-EM, 1791, exp. 39.

30. Apolant, *Génesis de la familia uruguaya*, 1376–78.

Analyzing the way in which these records were produced could help us to determine both their potential and limitations as a source. In marriage files, witnesses had to answer set questions that were written down by the notary in formulaic phrases. The same structure and phrases appeared in all files. Apparently, the notary first gathered the data he needed on a separate piece of paper before filling out the application form. An example of this is the following writing found on a piece of paper among the marriage files of 1802:

Josef natural de Pernambuco, no sabe, Negro Esclavo de D[oñ]a Maria Miranda viudo de Teresa que est[á] enterrada en la Yglesia de San Antonio en 16 años. Luis, Esclavo de la misma, natural de lo mismo, que la vio cuando se caso y después de allí algunos días murió, y asistió al entierro, y vinieron juntos los dos para esta tierra.³¹

This tells us that Josef and Luis were both slaves of Maria Miranda, that they were born in Pernambuco, and that they came together from there to Montevideo. Luis could confirm that the groom was a widower as he had met the first wife of Josef before her death. In this case, the enslaved groom began the marriage application rather than his mistress. After the first declaration of the groom or the master, the notary read to the groom the list of potential impediments to marriage, and he noted that he had done so in the file. Then the notary took down the testimony of the witnesses. Finally, he stated formally that there were no impediments to the marriage, and he authorized public notice of the wedding. Marriage files were four to six pages in length and varied little in format. There was certainly tension between what the notary wanted to write—the less, the better—and the length of information given by witnesses. Rather than containing page-long testimonies filled with details, the files offer just four or five lines providing specific information. Marriage files for white people were no longer than those of slaves: the notary always tried to save ink and paper.

Whether the spouses-to-be and the witnesses told the truth to the church's notary, as well as whether the witnesses actually knew the spouses, is debatable. The *testigos de soltería* or witnesses of bachelor status are different in each marriage file, which suggests that they were chosen by the prospective spouses. In contrast, the witnesses or godparents of the marriage itself, *compadres de matrimonio*, were almost always one of the sacristans, which suggests that they were not personally important to the spouses.³² That the witnesses in the marriage

31. Loose-leaf after case 38, AAM-EM, 1802.

32. I analyze the marriage registers, *actas matrimoniales*, for the years 1771–1777, 1784–1788, and 1794–1796. Five white men (Agustín Doncel, Joaquín Peregrin, Nicolás

files were almost always different people suggests that they were trusted by the spouses and were indeed part of networks on which the spouses could rely. On the question of these files' veracity, the priest gave notice of the wedding three times before the ceremony took place, and thus people did have an opportunity to testify against the prospective spouses.³³ But the only way to evaluate the accuracy of the narratives in these files is by cross-checking them against other sources. The story told in the 1788 marriage file of the Mina slave Ventura Molina matches the narrative written by his son Jacinto Molina in the 1820s.³⁴ Records on black confraternities and militias also lend credibility to the stories in these files. The free Angolas and Benguelas Juan Lopez, Antonio José Sosa, José Cayetano, and Manuel José Gonzales ran away from Portuguese Colonia, where they had been slaves, to Spanish Real de San Carlos between 1762 and 1777. They became noncommissioned officers in the Montevideo black militia in 1780. All but Manuel José Gonzales also held elective positions in the black confraternity of Saint Benito in this city during the 1780s. Antonio José Sosa was one of the witnesses provided by Juan Lopez in his marriage file, and Manuel José Gonzales acted similarly for José Cayetano.³⁵ Thus the bonds emerging from the shared experiences described in the marriage files later overlapped with ties developed from membership in both black militias and brotherhoods in Montevideo. These bonds show lifelong relationships between grooms and their witnesses.

Africans and their descendants did not marry in numbers comparable to

Fernández, Antonio Perez, and Tiburcio Ortega) filled the position of *compadre de matrimonio* in 81 percent of weddings of free and enslaved blacks and coloreds. AAM, *Actas de Matrimonio, 1771–1777, 1784–1788, 1794–1796*. Microfilm.

33. Alexandre Francisco, a free *crioulo*, wanted to marry Joaquina Maria do Sacramento, another free *crioula*, in Salvador in 1811. The mother of the bride denounced Alexandre as a slave, and claimed that he was already married. The mother wanted her daughter to be married to a *Nagô* man, but both spouses were Brazilian-born. Manolo Florentino and José Roberto Góes, *A paz das senzalas: Famílias escravas e tráfico atlântico, Rio de Janeiro, c. 1790–c. 1850* (Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 1997), 151. Montevideo was a small town in comparison with Buenos Aires, a place where everyone knew everyone and where locals who wanted the latest news stopped strangers in the streets. The church in Montevideo was small and of recent establishment; there was no menace of Inquisition intervention.

34. Jacinto Ventura de Molina, *Los caminos de la escritura negra en el Río de la Plata*, ed. William G. Acree Jr. and Alex Borucki (Madrid: Iberoamericana, 2010), 25–28.

35. AAM-EM, 1768, exp. 11; AAM-EM, 1780, exp. 41; AAM-EM, 1777, exp. 51; Archivo General de la Nación, Argentina (hereafter AGN-A), IX, 2-3-6, Black Militia of Montevideo, 31 May 1780; Archive of the Hermanos Conventuales, Montevideo, Libro de Elecciones de la Cofradía de San Benito.

their representation in the population of Montevideo. As mentioned earlier, in 1778 blacks and coloreds comprised 29 percent of the population of this city; yet in the mid-1770s and 1780s, marriage files for blacks and coloreds account for only 18 percent of all files. Only in two years did marriage files for slaves and freedmen constitute 30 percent of all cases: 1793 (31.9 percent) and 1798 (29.8 percent). Ecclesiastical authorities were much more likely to record nearly all slave marriages than census takers were to count all residents in a bustling port city such as Montevideo, which suggests that the city's free and enslaved population of African ancestry was probably larger than indicated by the census figures for this time. This affects how accurately Montevideo's marriage files represent the city's black community. In 1805, a list of Montevideo's inhabitants counted 2,874 slaves living in the inner city—30.7 percent of the inner city's total population—and 899 slaves residing outside the city walls—19 percent of the total population outside the walls. At that time, free blacks and coloreds living in Montevideo and outside the city walls accounted for 4.7 and 3 percent of the entire population, respectively.³⁶ In contrast, table 2 shows that 36.7 percent of black and colored grooms were free by the time of their marriage application. Free blacks born in Africa and the Americas, as well as coloreds, were thus overrepresented in the marriage files compared to their number within the city's total population of African ancestry. This is especially true for the period 1792–1803, when the number of slave grooms sharply diminished in marriage files. Enslaved Africans were particularly underrepresented, given that they comprised only 51.2 percent of slave grooms and 55.7 percent of slave brides included in the files. As enslaved Africans were not marrying proportionally to their number among the city's inhabitants, the shipboard connections they formed, and which I will analyze in the last section of this essay, must have been an even more important part of their social lives. In other words, social networks developed within the slave trade might have been more influential for them than their experiences of slavery in Montevideo as expressed, for instance, by Catholic marriage.

Table 2 shows that half of the witnesses for black and colored grooms were free, which makes sense given that one-fourth of all witnesses were recorded as white. As in many of the colonial documents of Montevideo, a blank *calidad* (quality) meant full European ancestry in the marriage files.³⁷ A person was

36. This list left unclear the origin of 633 peons living outside the city wall. Horacio Arredondo, "Los 'apuntes estadísticos' del Dr. Andrés Lamas," *Revista del Instituto Histórico y Geográfico del Uruguay* 4, no. 1 (1928): 23–24.

37. The colonial term *calidad* or quality gathered multiple identity markers beyond phenotype, including occupation, family background, legitimacy, and honor. See Andrew B.

Table 2. Status of spouses and witnesses in Montevideo's marriage files for black and colored grooms, 1768–1803

<i>Status</i>	<i>Grooms</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Brides</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Witnesses</i>	<i>%</i>
Slave	273	63.3	306	71.7	259	46.5
Free	158	36.7	121	28.3	298	53.5
Total	431	100	427	100	557	100

Source: Archivo del Arzobispado de Montevideo, Expedientes Matrimoniales, 1768–1803.

white if there was no descriptor such as *Negro* or *Pardo* (of mixed African and European ancestry) filled into the space for listing *calidad*. People of full European descent—Spanish, Portuguese, and criollo—as well as Amerindians testified in marriage files for people of African ancestry. I do not deny the important participation of white witnesses in these files, but most likely some of the witnesses listed as white were of mixed African origin. For instance, almost 60 percent of the witnesses in marriage files for pardos were recorded as being white. These witnesses shared origins in the Río de la Plata with the groom, and perhaps the notary just did not record them as pardo. In marriage registers analyzed by Alejandro Apolant, pardos and mestizos were not always recorded as such, and these categories were extremely fluid in the 1760s and 1770s.³⁸ Categories of *calidad* such as white, black, or mixed origin remained inconsistent even after this period. Jacinto Molina was the witness in a file in 1800, and the notary recorded him as a free pardo. However, Jacinto recognized himself as a free black in his writings, and he was recognized as such by others. I believe the notary whitened Jacinto Molina, turning him from black to mixed ancestry, because he was literate.³⁹ The categories *Negro* and *Pardo* had geographical con-

Fisher and Matthew D. O'Hara, "Introduction: Racial Identities and Their Interpreters in Colonial Latin America," in *Imperial Subjects: Race and Identity in Colonial Latin America*, ed. Andrew B. Fisher and Matthew D. O'Hara (Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press, 2009), 11–12.

38. From 1727 to 1767, Apolant shows 24 marriages involving pardo grooms and 8 with pardo brides. All but one were natives of Buenos Aires, Córdoba, and Paraguay. Only three weddings had both a pardo groom and bride; 18 pardo men married Indian women, and 5 pardo women married Indian or white grooms. Apolant shows that Indian women married to pardo men sometimes were recorded as pardo and vice versa, and that pardo men were not always figured as such in Spanish colonial censuses. Apolant, *Génesis de la familia uruguaya*, 927, 1001, 1108, 1143.

39. AAM-EM, 1800, exp. 8; Molina, *La escritura negra*.

notations as well. 83 percent (81 cases) of the pardo grooms were born in the Río de la Plata region, which today consists of Argentina, Uruguay, and Paraguay. Through migrations within the Río de la Plata these grooms came to Buenos Aires and Montevideo, where the population was growing rapidly. Their families had lived in this region for two or three generations, and they could navigate the codes of Spanish colonial culture. Most of the witnesses in their files, whether they were whites or pardos, had a shared Río de la Plata origin. In contrast, 83 percent (251 cases) of the black grooms were born in Africa. They came to Montevideo through the transatlantic and intra-American slave trades. Some of them had lived in Brazilian slave ports before arriving in Montevideo, and thus they had been in contact with Portuguese culture. People identified as *Negro* usually did not share itineraries ending in Montevideo with people identified as *Pardo*, suggesting that there was not much interaction between *negros* and *pardos* prior to meeting in Montevideo. Black grooms rarely asked witnesses of mixed origin to testify in their marriage files, and vice versa. Thus racial descriptors employed in these files intertwined with the social ties and geography described by their recorded testimonies.

The Geography of Testimonies

Marriage files provide detailed information about the origins of Africans and people of African ancestry living in Montevideo. Table 3 shows the broad origins of the black and colored spouses and witnesses who provided that information. Most of the sample is African, followed by people from the Río de la Plata. Even though they were the majority, Africans may be underrepresented in this count. The lack of information for almost two-thirds of the cases from 1792 to 1803, particularly for enslaved Africans, explains the overrepresentation of free blacks and coloreds born in the Río de la Plata. By 1812, no less than 70 percent of the black population of Montevideo was born in Africa.⁴⁰ Table 3 also illustrates that the racial descriptors employed in marriage files overlapped with geographical origins: Africans and most people born in Brazil were recorded as black, while most of those from the Río de la Plata were registered as pardos.

The marriage files of Africans feature people predominantly from Portuguese Angola and Kongo. Most of the spouses and grooms declared Benguela (41.7 percent) or Angola (18.3 percent), the region around Luanda, as their homeland, but those who declared provenance from Luanda or Benguela

40. AGN-U, AGA, libro 249, Padrones de Montevideo. Censo de varias calles, Año 1812.

Table 3. Origins of black and colored spouses and witnesses. Marriage files of Montevideo, blacks and coloreds, 1768–1803

<i>Calidad</i>	<i>Africa</i>	<i>Brazil</i>	<i>Río de la Plata</i>	<i>Other</i>	<i>Total</i>
Black	717	84	51	8	860
Pardo	0	24	184	6	214
Total	717	108	235	14	1,074
%	66.7	10.1	21.9	1.3	100

Source: Archivo del Arzobispado de Montevideo, Expedientes Matrimoniales, 1768–1803.

were not necessarily born there. These were two major slave ports from which West Central Africans were shipped to America. Spouses and witnesses also declared other Angolan eponyms as their provenance: Gangela, Masangano, Mondongo, Ambaca, Garangui, Songo, Mocondo, Cambonda, Casancha, Manguela, Camunda, Rebolo, Lubolo, Upolo, and Majumbe.⁴¹ Some of these places, such as Masangano and Ambaca, were inland villages (*presidios*) from where the Portuguese tried to expand their authority over neighboring African polities. Congo, which referred to the decentralized mid-eighteenth-century Kingdom of Kongo and its satellites,⁴² was the third most important region of origin, appearing in these files for 14.9 percent of the Africans included. The eponym *Congo* also described Africans whose provenance was south of the Congo River, but who were taken via slave routes to Luanda or other northern Portuguese ports or were sold by African merchants to British and French slavers in Cabinda (a modern-day Angolan exclave), Loango (Republic of Congo), and Muyumba (Gabon).⁴³

Captives from West Central Africa shared common linguistic origins, given that the predominant languages of this region, Kimbundu and Kikongo, were as mutually intelligible as Spanish was to Portuguese. While divided into multiple kingdoms and smaller entities, West Central African societies shared a foundation of matrilineal kinship. John Thornton and Linda Heywood also point out that along with sharing similarities in language and family structure, many captives leaving Kongo and Angola were at least nominally Christian in

41. I thank Daniel Domingues for helping me to identify African eponyms pertaining to eighteenth-century Angola.

42. John K. Thornton, *The Kingdom of Kongo: Civil War and Transition, 1641–1718* (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1983), 115–21.

43. Roquinaldo Amaral Ferreira, “Transforming Atlantic Slaving: Trade, Warfare and Territorial Control in Angola, 1650–1800” (PhD diss., UCLA, 2003), 107. See also entries for Congo provenance in *Voyages Database*.

the seventeenth century.⁴⁴ Evidence from mid-eighteenth-century Montevideo supports this. Between 1768 and 1781, four Kongo, four Angola, and one Ambaca groom provided the Christian name of their parents in their marriage files, which suggests that they were at least second-generation Catholics. Catholic Africans comprised at least 10 percent of all African grooms marrying in this early period. Six Angola and Kongo witnesses, as well as two Kongo and one Benguela bride, also provided the Christian names of their parents in these same years. Out of nine Christian grooms, three arrived in Montevideo via Rio de Janeiro and Colonia, which suggests a forced departure from Luanda. Six other grooms may have crossed the Atlantic in just four slave vessels arriving in Buenos Aires and Montevideo: the Spanish *San Jorge* (arriving in 1752), which brought slaves from Angola; the British ship *Saint Andrew* (arriving in 1752), which followed the same itinerary; the Spanish *San Pedro* (arriving in 1759), which departed from Mayumba with mostly Kongo slaves; and the Spanish ship *San Juan Evangelista* (arriving in 1760), which embarked captives in Loango.⁴⁵ It remains unclear to what extent warfare in the Kingdom of Kongo and its neighbors shaped the enslavement and shipment of Catholic Africans in the mid-eighteenth century. While bypassing Portuguese control, Spanish, British, and French slavers drew captives directly from African merchants in ports north of Luanda in the 1760s, which is illustrated by the four slave voyages just mentioned. In contrast, West Central Africans arriving via Rio de Janeiro to Montevideo between 1770 and 1799 had initially departed from Luanda and Benguela, where the enslavement and shipment of Catholic Africans to the Atlantic was formally prohibited. West Central African vassals of the Portuguese who had embraced Christianity were not supposed to have been enslaved, but Catholicism did not entirely protect them from enslavement, even in areas under Portuguese control.⁴⁶

Even though a minority, these Christian West Central Africans ranked among the first black leaders in Montevideo. Pedro Mascareño, who declared provenance in Kongo, arrived in the Río de la Plata in one of the aforementioned

44. Linda M. Heywood and John K. Thornton, *Central Africans, Atlantic Creoles, and the Foundation of the Americas, 1585–1660* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2007), 56 (on language), 327–31 (on Christianity).

45. *Voyages Database*; AGN-A, IX, 2-2-1. See Studer, Cuadro XV on slave vessels.

46. Ferreira, “Transforming Atlantic Slaving,” 202; Borucki, “Slave Trade to the Río de la Plata”; Mariana Pinho Candido, “Enslaving Frontiers: Slavery, Trade, and Identity in Benguela, 1780–1850” (PhD diss., York University, 2006), 56; John Thornton, “As guerras civis no Congo e o tráfico de escravos: A história e a demografia de 1718 a 1844 revisitadas,” *Estudos Afro-Asiáticos* 32 (1997): 55–74.

slave vessels in the 1750s. The Jesuit priest Cosme Agullo purchased him. Pedro was free by the time of his marriage in 1773 to María, another Kongo. The two witnesses in his marriage file had known Pedro for 20 years in Montevideo. Pedro stated that his parents' names were Sebastian and Maria, which indicates previous Christianization. In the same year, he began the process of founding the confraternity of Saint Benito in Montevideo. Five years later, Pedro was the first *hermano mayor* and *mayordomo mayor* of this brotherhood. He was also the second lieutenant of the first black militia of Montevideo in 1780, where he followed Lieutenant Mateo de los Santos, another Kongo, and Captain Antonio Silva, a free black born in Buenos Aires. Pedro still headed the brotherhood of Saint Benito in 1788.⁴⁷ Both his Christian experience in Kongo and his proximity to the Jesuits in Montevideo may have facilitated Pedro Mascareño's establishment of the first black confraternity of this city in 1778.

Apart from West Central Africa, the only other broad region consistently represented in the marriage files is the Costa da Mina, at 4.8 percent of our sample. Slaves from the Costa da Mina were shipped from Salvador to Montevideo in the 1780s and 1790s, a period in which Salvador was prominent in the intra-American slave trade to the Río de la Plata.⁴⁸ However, fewer Mina slaves show up in these files than expected. The same is true for slaves coming from Mozambique and the Bight of Biafra—the first- and third-ranked regions in the slave trade proceeding directly from Africa to the Río de la Plata from 1777 to 1812. Chronology explains the lack of cases from Mozambique, since significant slave arrivals from there to Montevideo began only after 1796, just when references to slaves began to disappear from marriage files. Before 1797, there is only one file where both groom and witnesses declared origin from Mozambique.⁴⁹ The low number of Biafran slaves in the records has a different explanation. In 1787–88, the *Compañía de Filipinas*, a Spanish royal trading company, shipped 2,900 slaves from Bonny and Old Calabar to the Río de la Plata. Only 2,177

47. AGN-A, IX, 2-3-6, Black Militia of Montevideo, 31 May 1780; AGN-U, AGA, caja 37, carpeta 4, Constitución de San Benito de Palermo, 1773–1774; Archive of the Hermanos Conventuales, Montevideo, Libro de Elecciones de la Cofradía de San Benito.

48. On the debates of what *Mina* meant over time, see Robin Law, "Ethnicity and the Slave Trade: 'Lucumi' and 'Nago' as Ethnonyms in West Africa," *History in Africa* 24 (1997): 205–19; Robin Law, "Ethnicities of Enslaved Africans in the Diaspora: On the Meanings of 'Mina' (Again)," *History in Africa* 32 (2005): 247–67.

49. The three of them had arrived in Montevideo in 1782, brought by a French slave ship that had departed from Mauritius. AAM-EM, 1783, exp. 24. See AGN-A, IX, 14-4-5, *Marques de Flori*, 1 July 1782.

Africans arrived alive in Montevideo, of whom 1,073 were sent to Lima. Of the remainder, it seems that only 21 were sold in Montevideo.⁵⁰

Table 3 shows 10 percent (108) of this sample composed of people of African ancestry born in Brazil. Of this group 59.2 percent were enslaved, and 40.8 free. A large majority of the slaves arriving in the Río de la Plata before 1777 came through Brazilian ports, and the ratio was still 60 percent from that year to the end of the traffic in 1812. Slaves shipped from Brazil to Montevideo most likely were African rather than Brazilian-born. Nevertheless, slave vessels from Brazil also brought a handful of captives native to Brazil. The ship *Nuestra Señora de los Dolores* carried 151 slaves from Salvador to Montevideo in 1786, out of whom seven were from Salvador.⁵¹ Upon interrogation, one of these captives claimed he knew how to write, an example of the transference from Brazil to the Río de la Plata of slaves with specific skills. Papers belonging to the Portuguese smuggler Antonio d’Cunha supply details on slave purchases required by his contacts in Montevideo in 1781. They sought slave carpenters, shipwrights, masons, shoemakers, barrel-makers, and musicians, as well as “mulatas” who could cook, iron, and sew.⁵² The elites of Montevideo preferred Luso-Brazilian ways of cooking, completing domestic chores, and doing crafts. Luso-Hispanic trading networks led to the emergence of Montevideo as an Atlantic port, and this must have shaped such taste and fashion.⁵³

In table 3, the column *Other* refers to those who did not come from the three broad provenances listed in the table and arrived instead from Peru, Chile, the Spanish Caribbean, the Philippines, and Spain. Blacks and coloreds born in these places came to Montevideo as sailors in the Spanish navy or as servants of Spanish administrative and military officers. Their presence in these files shows the growing bureaucracy and military personnel in Montevideo linked with the rising significance of this port for the defense of the Spanish South Atlantic. In 1767, the crown allowed a line of mail vessels from A Coruña, Gali-

50. AGN-A, Sala IX, 33-6-1, “Dn Martin de Sarratea apoderado. . . .,” 1789; Archivo General de Indias (hereafter AGI), Seville, Buenos Aires, leg. 447, Cuentas de la Real Hacienda de Montevideo, 1789–1798. I wonder if some witnesses and grooms described as Guinea were in fact Carabali, as the term *Guinea* may have been applied to Africans whose provenance was outside Angola and Congo.

51. AGN-A, Sala IX, 33-3-6, exp. 873, 1786.

52. AGI, Buenos Aires, leg. 333, “Montevideo, quinto legajo de papeles hallados en poder de Antonio Juan de Acuña. . . .,” Buenos Aires, 20 Mar. 1785.

53. Fabrício Prado, “In the Shadows of Empires: Trans-Imperial Networks and Colonial Identity in Bourbon Río de la Plata” (PhD diss., Emory University, 2009), 257.

cia, to travel to Montevideo. From 1776, all shipping sailing from Spain to Peru was required to stop in Montevideo. The royal navy made Montevideo its base in the South Atlantic as well. The crown created a royal customs and coast guard administration there in 1779.⁵⁴

The marriage files also indicate where grooms and witnesses met before arriving in Montevideo, and this reveals patterns of internal slave trading and regional migration. In 1778 Bernardo, a slave born in Angola, testified for the marriage file of Juan, a slave from Benguela. Bernardo said about Juan that “que le conoce hara cosa de dieziocho años entre en las costas de Guinea y un año en el Rioxaneiro y otro en la Colonia y siete en esta de Montevideo y siempre desde Angola [h]an ido juntos.”⁵⁵ He had met Juan in Portuguese Angola. Then they were shipped together to Rio de Janeiro and then to Colonia. Spanish Montevideo was the third slave port where they arrived, either by land or sea. Bernardo said he had met Juan 18 years previously, but this time frame is doubtful given that Juan was roughly in his twenties according to the estimated age recorded in his file. However, the itinerary described by Bernardo is convincing, as other Africans traveled similar—but not identical—slave routes. In each file, witnesses mentioned from one to three locations when telling where they had met the groom. Table 4 tabulates the number of times each place was mentioned by a witness.

This table pulls together 704 references to locations where witnesses met grooms. Montevideo is included only when this city was the only place mentioned by the witness, which implies that he had not met the groom outside of Montevideo. The total number of places mentioned, as well as testimonies collected, decreases over time, which reflects the declining amount of data contained by these files. Thus, for the period 1792–1803, the database has less than one-third of the total number of mentioned places found for the 1770s. Table 4 also gathers depositions from witnesses of all colors, which means that white witnesses are included.

Table 4 shows that places in Africa comprise just 5 percent of the locations mentioned by witnesses. We may have expected more testimonies from Africans meeting before the Atlantic passage, but we must remember that it was through Brazilian ports that most slaves arrived in the Río de la Plata. As the next section shows, on board ships or in previous slave ports in the Americas were the two most frequently mentioned places where witnesses met slave

54. John Street, *Artigas and the Emancipation of Uruguay* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1959), 34.

55. AAM-EM, 1778, exp. 36.

Table 4. Places where groom and witnesses met. Marriage files of Montevideo, blacks and coloreds, 1768–1803

<i>Colonia and Real de San Carlos</i>	<i>Buenos Aires</i>	<i>Other Río de la Plata, Paraguay</i>	<i>Africa</i>	<i>Río de Janeiro</i>	<i>Other Brazil</i>	<i>Montevideo</i>	<i>Other Banda Oriental</i>	<i>Other</i>	<i>Total</i>
121	100	51	37	97	66	188	25	19	704
17.1%	14.2%	7.2%	5.3%	13.8%	9.4%	26.7%	3.6%	2.7%	100%

Source: Archivo del Arzobispado de Montevideo, Expedientes Matrimoniales, 1768–1803.

grooms. The slave trade from Brazil to the Río de la Plata also shaped shipmate networks. That is why Rio de Janeiro and Portuguese Colonia del Sacramento, in addition to other Brazilian regions, are so prominent in table 4.

After its capture by the Spanish in 1777, Colonia del Sacramento experienced an extreme decline as a slave trade entrepôt. From 1768 to 1779, almost 30 percent of all witnesses had met the groom either in Colonia or in the Real de San Carlos, the Spanish garrison located just a cannon shot from Colonia. Most of these people had come from Rio de Janeiro, which indicates that the main slave trade route ending in Montevideo passed through Rio de Janeiro and Colonia from 1760 to 1777. The Spanish conquest of Colonia ended the city's role as a trading site for the Spanish and the Portuguese.⁵⁶ In the 1780s, at least 10 percent of witnesses claimed to have met the groom there, but by the next decade Colonia lost significance for the life of Montevideo's black population. Before the fall of Colonia, slaves commonly fled from this town to the Spanish Real de San Carlos, as shown by this testimony from 1778: "se desertaron para el Real de San Carlos en las Guerras primeras de Cevallos."⁵⁷ The two witnesses and the groom, all free Africans living in Montevideo by the time of the wedding, had run away from Colonia to Real de San Carlos in the early 1760s.

From 1768 to 1779, increasing numbers of respondents met in the Spanish Río de la Plata before arriving in Montevideo. They mainly came from neighboring Buenos Aires but also from Córdoba, Tucumán, Salta, Catamarca, Santiago del Estero, Mendoza, Corrientes, Santa Fe, and Paraguay. Some of these were free blacks and coloreds who migrated to Montevideo as the city absorbed craftsmen during its expansion in the late eighteenth century. Others were slaves who moved with their masters to Montevideo. Early in the eighteenth century, the Spanish authorities of Paraguay revived taxation of free blacks and coloreds. In addition to the bustling activity in Buenos Aires and Montevideo, this taxation may explain the migration of free Africans and their descendants from Paraguay to these two port cities, where they were not subject to such tax.⁵⁸ Finally, the growing importance of the category *Other* (defined as meeting in Spain, the Philippines, Peru, or the Caribbean) also reveals long-distance movements of Spanish imperial military and administrative resources to Montevideo.

56. Prado, "In the Shadows of Empires."

57. AAM-EM, 1778, exp. 17.

58. Ignacio Telesca, "Sociedad y afrodescendientes en el proceso de independencia del Paraguay," in *Negros de la Patria: Los afrodescendientes en las luchas por la independencia en el antiguo Virreinato del Río de la Plata*, ed. Silvia Mallo and Ignacio Telesca (Buenos Aires: Editorial SB, 2010), 164.

A small share of testimonies state that the witness and groom met in places in the Banda Oriental, modern-day Uruguay, other than Montevideo and Colonia. Those places include the old Spanish settlements of Soriano and Vívoras near the Uruguay River and the Plata River and new towns such as Maldonado near the Portuguese frontier. Those who claimed to have met in these places usually were free blacks who worked in the countryside and then came to Montevideo or slaves who had fled or been purchased from the Portuguese eastern borderland. Finally, Montevideo accounted for one-fourth of the meeting places identified. Not every groom had ties with his witnesses before arriving in this city, but this is what we would expect, and it ultimately suggests that the stories recorded in marriage files were neither invented nor formulaic.

Portuguese America was the broad region that accounts for more than 20 percent of the references to meeting place in the files.⁵⁹ Rio de Janeiro was of the utmost importance for the slave trade to the Río de la Plata. Witnesses also met the groom in other Brazilian slave ports (Salvador, Pernambuco, Santa Catarina), inland locations (São Paulo and Minas Gerais), and frontier villages (Rio Grande, Rio Pardo, and Viamão). In these cases, witnesses and groom had met in previous slave ports before being shipped to the Spanish dominions, as runaway slaves, or as soldiers deserting from the Portuguese army. In 1777, free black Manuel Xavier de la Cruz, who was from Rio de Janeiro, acted as witness for Manuel de Jesus, a free Mondongo from Angola. Manuel told the notary about Juan that “cinco años lo conocio en la Ciudad de San Pablo en el Brasil y vinieron desertados juntos para Misiones y de alli pasaron a Buenos Aires.”⁶⁰ Both were soldiers or members of Portuguese militias who fled to Spanish missions during wartime and then down the Paraná River to Buenos Aires and Montevideo. In this case, war and migration determined their patterns of movements rather than the internal slave trade.

Shipmates: Social Networks Emerging from the Slave Trade

To show how the marriage files portray social networks, I have classified each testimony according to witnesses' explanations of how they met the groom. Table 5 tabulates the testimonies according to eight categories: (1) the witnesses and groom had been shipmates in the slave trade, (2) they had met in previous slave ports, but it is not clear that they were shipmates, (3) they shared origin in

59. Here I do not include Colonia, which belonged to the Portuguese Empire until 1777.

60. AAM-EM, 1777, exp. 11.

Table 5. How witnesses first met the groom. Marriage files of Montevideo, blacks and coloreds, 1768–1803

<i>Status of groom</i>	<i>Río de la Plata</i>									
	<i>Shipmates</i>	<i>Met in previous slave port</i>	<i>Ran away together</i>	<i>Military experience</i>	<i>shared origin or migration</i>	<i>Same craft</i>	<i>Same master</i>	<i>Unknown</i>	<i>Total</i>	
Slave	82	74	0	11	9	1	37	95	309	
%	26.5	24.0	0	3.6	2.9	0.3	12.0	30.7	100.0	
Free	12	29	10	15	89	28	5	60	248	
%	4.8	11.7	4.0	6.1	35.9	11.3	2.0	24.2	100.0	
Total	94	103	10	26	98	29	42	155	557	
%	16.9	18.5	1.8	4.7	17.6	5.2	7.5	27.8	100.0	
Without White Witnesses	94	103	10	16	67	15	42	100	447	
%	21.0	23.0	2.2	3.6	15.0	3.4	9.4	22.4	100.0	

Source: Archivo del Arzobispado de Montevideo, Expedientes Matrimoniales, 1768–1803.

the Río de la Plata region or migrated together from another city in the region, (4) they shared the same master, (5) they ran away together from Portuguese to Spanish territory, (6) they served together in the military, (7) they were artisans of the same craft, and (8) unknown.⁶¹

Marriage files for slaves show that experiences in the slave trade were particularly important for developing social ties. People who had been shipmates in slave vessels or who had met each other in slave ports before arriving in Montevideo constitute the witnesses in half of all marriage testimonies for slaves. Networks developed in the slave trade are even more important if we remove the testimonies of white witnesses, as I do in the last row of table 5. One-third of testimonies under the category *Unknown*, as well 30 percent of those in the category *Río de la Plata shared origin or migration*, came from white witnesses. Nearly 40 percent of witnesses under the category *Military experience* and half of those under the category *Same craft* were recorded as white too. After removing white witnesses, the combined categories *Shipmates* and *Met in previous slave port* constitute 44 percent of the total, and this total goes up to 58 percent if we exclude all unknown cases from our count. Migratory experience also shaped the social networks of free blacks and people of mixed origin, though these ties were mostly developed through free migrations from the hinterland of the Río de la Plata to Buenos Aires and Montevideo. It is worth noticing that Montevideo and Buenos Aires were probably the two Spanish American cities with the highest percentages of European and internal free migrants in the early 1800s.⁶² Marriage files may also reveal the origins of the free population, as well as broad similarities in the migratory paths and social connections binding European grooms to their witnesses. But that is the subject of another article.⁶³

While the category *Shipmates* holds steady over the 36 years of this study, the category *Met in previous slave port* decreases over time. Perhaps this reflects

61. I was unable to identify the relationship between groom and witness in 27.8 percent of the available testimonies, which I label as *Unknown*. In these cases, the files usually contain short phrases describing companionship such as “que han sido compañeros.” See AAM-EM, 1794, exp. 40.

62. Johnson and Socolow, “Población y espacio.”

63. While Spanish immigrants could write back to their families and friends in Spain and thus renew the links with their homelands, Africans could only depend on shipmate networks and African-based associations to relive memories of their past. Catholic confraternities also shaped ethnic collective identities across the Spanish Atlantic. See Tamar Herzog, “Private Organizations as Global Networks in Early Modern Spain and Spanish America,” in *The Collective and the Public in Latin America: Cultural Identities and Political Order*, ed. Luis Roniger and Tamar Herzog (Portland, OR: Sussex Academic Press, 2000), 118–33.

how in the 1780s more people than before were shipped in the same vessels from Africa to Brazil and then to Montevideo and were not disembarked first at Rio de Janeiro or Salvador, which constituted just a stopover. Thus the beginning of an increasingly direct slave trade between Africa and Montevideo in the 1790s could explain this decrease in the last period of our sample, as fewer people than before would have met in other slave ports prior to their arrival in Montevideo. While the decline in the number and quality of slave files in the 1790s might partially account for this trend in the last 12 years of this study, the decrease is already noticeable in the 1780s, when most slaves were shipped from Africa to Montevideo via Brazil with no lengthy stopover in Brazilian ports.

The broad categories of table 5 disguise rich details of slaves' previous associations, and a more fine-grained analysis is called for. It is possible to separate out those who had been shipmates from those who had met in previous slave ports. For the former group, I chose testimonies where the notary specifically wrote down that the witness and groom had arrived together in Montevideo. Certain testimonies describe the entire itinerary of a slave voyage from Africa to this city, such as "que vinieron juntos desde Guinea estuvieron a la Colonia y desde alli en esta de Montevideo"⁶⁴ and "lo conoce por haber venido junto con [é] en una embarcacion desde Benguela al Janeiro, y de este a Montevideo."⁶⁵ In these cases, the phrasing is definitive about the shared experience in slave vessels, whether from Africa or Brazil. A further group of cases shows that the witness and the groom had met before, but the phrasing does not definitively establish that they were shipmates. These were people who met again in Montevideo after sharing past experiences in other slave ports, as the following excerpts indicate: "que le conoce quince años, que le conoció en las tierras de Congo y un año en el Rioxaneiro y diez años en esta ciudad";⁶⁶ "lo empezo a conocer en su tierra muchos años";⁶⁷ "que hace diez años que le conoce en Santa Catalina."⁶⁸ In most of these cases, witnesses said they had met the groom in their homeland or in a Brazilian slave port, but their testimonies do not allow me to necessarily infer that they were shipmates in slave vessels. Certain witnesses declared that they met the groom in Africa, but that they came to Montevideo in different years, as in this case of 1771: "que le conocio en Congo hace seis años, y después se ausento el declarante para esta de Montevideo despues de haber pasado seis

64. AAM-EM, 1778, exp. 45.

65. AAM-EM, 1783, exp. 3.

66. AAM-EM, 1773, exp. 24.

67. AAM-EM, 1778, exp. 36.

68. AAM-EM, 1788, exp. 21.

años poco menos vino el contra[y]ente.”⁶⁹ The witness did not clarify if they had stopped in other slave ports because the important piece of information for the church was that he had met the groom in Kongo.

Testimonies of shipmates varied greatly from case to case. Occasionally, the witness and the groom reencountered each other in Montevideo after being shipmates in the transatlantic passage but not in the intra-American slave trade, as portrayed by this testimony from 1788: “que conoce al referido Gonzalo desde Angola al Rio Geneyro que bin[i]eron juntos que el declarante se bino primero a esta ciudad dejando al d[i]ho Gonzalo en el Rio Geneyro.”⁷⁰ In a case from 1778, another shipmate witness expressed a common origin with the groom through a shared language: “vinieron juntos siempre en esta siendo Bozales en la lengua en donde han estado hasta ora y Esclavos.”⁷¹ In a few cases shipmates even mentioned the vessel in which they arrived in Montevideo, as this slave did in 1794: “que hace cinco meses que llegaron a este Puerto en el Penque.”⁷² These slaves had just arrived five months before the marriage application took place from Brazil, not from Africa, in a vessel known as *Penque Portugués*. They must have lived in Brazil for some time before arriving in Montevideo, which would explain both how they communicated with the notary and their understanding of the proceedings for marriage.

As already mentioned, migrations within the Río de la Plata often featured significantly in the origins of blacks and coloreds who married in colonial Montevideo. Links between free and coerced migrations also shaped relationships between grooms and witnesses in the category *Río de la Plata shared origin or migration* in table 5. The difference between coerced and free migration was sometimes blurred, as when the groom and witnesses were imprisoned together in Buenos Aires and then sent as convicts to Montevideo. In 1769, a witness declared he had met the groom because “vino preso a esta ciudad.”⁷³ In another case the two witnesses were in prison by the time of the marriage application.⁷⁴ As shown by testimony from 1771, such prisoners were employed in the public works: “d[ic]ho Negro se escapó para Buenos Aires y que no lo ha visto [h]ará de poco tiempo que vino desterrado para estas obras reales de esta ciudad.”⁷⁵ Here

69. AAM-EM, 1771, exp. 12.

70. AAM-EM, 1788, exp. 10.

71. AAM-EM, 1778, exp. 23.

72. AAM-EM, 1794, exp. 1.

73. AAM-EM, 1769, exp. 26.

74. AAM-EM, 1774, exp. 17.

75. AAM-EM, 1771, exp. 5.

Gonzalo Rocha, a free black born in Salvador, had run away from Portuguese Colonia, where he probably was a slave, to Buenos Aires. It remains unclear why he was jailed in Buenos Aires, but then he was sent as a convict to Montevideo. Sometimes these convicts remained in Montevideo after their release and started a family there, as indeed Gonzalo was trying to do.

Some grooms and witnesses seemed to owe their relationship to sharing the same craft and working together. A 1794 file brought together a groom and witnesses who were tailors. The second witness declared, “Que sobre once años que trabaja con el referido Bera tanto en casa del maestro Pin como en su misma casa.”⁷⁶ This witness worked with the groom in two separate workshops. In that same year, a file describes a groom and witnesses who were all carpenters.⁷⁷ These cases also commonly illustrate regional migration within the Río de la Plata and contain a mix of white, black, and pardo witnesses. In 1800 Pedro Godel, an Indian shoemaker from Cuzco, wanted to marry Juliana, a slave born in Montevideo. The two witnesses were people of mixed European and African ancestry who also worked as shoemakers.⁷⁸

Grooms and witnesses also met due to a common military background. In 1772, the first witness in the file of Francisco Zelaya, a free pardo born in Córdoba, declared about Francisco “que salieron juntos de esta ciudad para las Misiones en la expedición con el Cap. Gal. Andonegui.”⁷⁹ Both had probably been conscripted for the Guaraní War. Francisco Zelaya was the captain of the pardo militia of Montevideo in 1780, making militia participation an important feature of his life.⁸⁰ In the file of Manuel Campero, a free pardo from Buenos Aires who married in 1802, both the groom and the second witness were members of the pardo militia of Buenos Aires. Their military service in the Spanish-Portuguese War in the Banda Oriental explains why they had been moved from Buenos Aires to Montevideo the year before.⁸¹ War with the Portuguese was a common point of reference in the period 1768–1779, when witnesses often declared having met the groom before, during, or after hostilities: “que salieron de d[ic]ha Colonia en el tiempo de las guerras y desde aquel entonces siempre han estado en Montevideo”;⁸² “que le conoce hara cosa de nueve años desde las

76. AAM-EM, 1794, exp. 15.

77. AAM-EM, 1794, exp. 76.

78. AAM-EM, 1800, exp. 37.

79. AAM-EM, 1772, exp. 2.

80. AGN-U, Archivos Judiciales, Civil 1° (Cabildo de Montevideo), caja 51, exp. 80, 1781.

81. AAM-EM, 1802, exp. 9A.

82. AAM-EM, 1768, exp. 16.

ultimas guerras en el tiempo de Don Pedro Sevallos y que han trabajado los dos juntos con su amo.”⁸³ This last witness and groom met because of war, but they stayed in touch given that they worked together as free laborers. Slaves living on the Portuguese frontier commonly took advantage of war to run away to the Spanish. Therefore, these wars opened venues to obtain freedom and became a powerful factor in slaves’ lives.

In just a few cases did grooms meet witnesses in more than one way; in such cases, I list only the initial meeting in my database. In 1799, a witness and a groom, both pardos from Paraguay, arrived together in Montevideo from Paraguay and then worked together: “que vinieron juntos a esta tierra en donde trabajan juntos.”⁸⁴ People in this case shared the same origin in the Río de la Plata and then worked together in the same craft in Montevideo. In a 1781 case, the groom and the first witness were from Kongo and had arrived in Buenos Aires together in the same ship, likely traveling from West Central Africa. In Buenos Aires, they were bought by the Jesuit order, as the first witness declared: “vinieron juntos en una embarcación hasta llegar a Buenos Aires y fueron esclavos de la Compañía de Jesús.”⁸⁵ The second witness met the groom as a slave of the Jesuits, not as a shipmate. In tables here the relationship between the groom and the first witness is classed as *Shipmates*, and the link between the groom and the second witness as *Same master*.

In table 5, almost all the testimonies classified as *Unknown* were of people who met in Montevideo. Herman Bennett underscores the importance of shared spaces in the selection of marriage witnesses in colonial Mexico.⁸⁶ He points out that slaves and freedmen commonly selected witnesses with whom they shared a household or neighborhood. This observation likewise applies to grooms and witnesses in Montevideo who had the same master and thus shared a household and probably to most grooms and witnesses whose relationship I classified as *Unknown*. I found no case of witnesses saying that they had been neighbors of the groom. However, testimonies of long-standing companionship suggest shared experience as neighbors, such as “que son compañeros sobre diez años” and “que le conoce hará ocho años en esta ciudad.”⁸⁷ Closer analysis of common broad origins sheds further light on the experience of those included in the category *Unknown*. I would have expected that a common broad origin

83. AAM-EM, 1771, exp. 22.

84. AAM-EM, 1799, exp. 38.

85. AAM-EM, 1781, exp. 11.

86. Bennett, *Africans in Colonial Mexico*, 84–86.

87. AAM-EM, 1802, exp. 51; AAM-EM, 1782, exp. 42.

might have been an incentive for the groom to choose a witness he had met only in Montevideo. But in fact, only for 20 percent of cases involving Africans in the category *Unknown* were groom and witness of the same broad origin, mostly hailing from Benguela, Angola, and Kongo. Apparently, a shared broad origin was not important for African grooms when choosing a witness from among people they knew only from life in Montevideo. Thus, these cases may be explained by proximity and friendship developed from experience in this city.

A common broad origin, and perhaps shared ethnicity, was relevant for African grooms when selecting witnesses, but overall it seems less significant than shared experience. Out of the 284 witnesses selected by African grooms, 21.5 percent were not African but European, criollo, or Amerindian, and 45 percent were African but not from the same broad region as the groom.⁸⁸ Only one-third (33.5 percent) of African witnesses came from the same region as the groom, but this ratio varies across the categories in table 5. Thus, 52 percent of African witnesses who had been shipmates with African grooms also shared a common broad origin such as Benguela. The same was true for 38 percent of African witnesses who had met the African groom in a previous port before arriving in Montevideo. Shared experience in slave trade routes often, though not always, overlapped and subsumed common African origins, and both factors appeared as determinants for Africans in creating social networks in Montevideo.

Clear expressions of solidarity emerge from among those who claimed a common African provenance, as suggested by these testimonies of 1790: “que lo conoce desde que era muchachito por el motivo de ser de la Benguela”;⁸⁹ “que eran de un mismo [b]arrio alla en Camondad y vinieron juntos para esta.”⁹⁰ In the last case, the witness seems to stress that he had shared his place of origin with the groom, given that the notary wrote down “barrio” (neighborhood) to modify the African eponym *Camondá*. At the least, the witness wanted to express a common origin with the groom. Witnesses gave clues about their ethnic identities, as the notary wrote down details such as “Guarangi en Benguela”⁹¹ or “descendiente de Banguela y natural de la Ciudad de Córdoba del Tucumán.”⁹² These sentences might express the will of the slave to specify his

88. The 431 marriage files should produce 862 witnesses—two witnesses per case. But this is not the case. In fact, I have 557 witnesses in my database, as some marriage files had no witnesses while others had only one. In addition, I know the origin of only 487 witnesses, out of which 284 were selected by African grooms.

89. AAM-EM, 1790, exp. 61.

90. AAM-EM, 1791, exp. 3.

91. AAM-EM, 1775, exp. 27.

92. AAM-EM, 1801, exp. 4.

geographic origin or his claim of certain ancestry in Africa. However, such detailed testimonies are exceptions.

Yet broad African origins were certainly not consonant with ethnicity, as enslaved people from many different inland regions embarked at the same African slave port. The same is true for captives who met up on intra-American slave voyages. On the one hand, African eponyms such as *Benguela* and *Angola* tell more about slave trade routes than about African origins. On the other hand, labels such as *Bolo*, *Rebolo*, and *Lubolo*, which are sparse in marriage files, point to the geographical origins of those enslaved in West Central Africa. Perhaps the majority of witnesses in the marriage files identified themselves with broad categories such as *Benguela* since these connected them with more people than did specific ethnic labels and were descriptive of an experience in the slave trade that, while not shared, may have had features common to several captives.⁹³ The Spanish and Portuguese initially labeled Africans with these eponyms, which for Europeans meant *origin* or *nation*. Slaves probably reshaped these meanings to connect with other captives, given that African eponyms often related to common slave routes that redefined slaves' shared identities. This study enables us to understand how captives caught up in the slave trade created alternative meanings for the nomenclature of slave traders that allowed displaced Africans to define new communities based on their shared past and experience. Moreover, this process shows that "in the shift from imposition to self-interpretation, received terms are rarely if ever entirely synonymous with self-assumed ones."⁹⁴

93. Joseph Miller gives a slightly different interpretation of this appropriation of slave trade nomenclature by West Central Africans: "Since the growing variety of the origins of the central Africans and the instability of political identity in the turmoil of slaving at home, as well as the greater contrast between them and the West African Minas in Brazil, would have promoted only the broadest sense of shared backgrounds, they appropriated the commercial distinction of their masters as 'Angolas' or 'Benguelas' by their ports of embarkation in Africa. Small groups of countrymen might use specific 'ethnic' affinities to collaborate for special purposes, networking ad hoc for mutual protection, but these associations were pragmatic tactics more than comprehensive, even politicized identities." Joseph C. Miller, "Retention, Reinvention, and Remembering: Restoring Identities through Enslavement in Africa and under Slavery in Brazil," in *Enslaving Connections: Changing Cultures of Africa and Brazil during the Era of Slavery*, ed. José C. Curto and Paul E. Lovejoy (New York: Humanity Books, 2004), 99.

94. David Theo Goldberg, *Racist Culture: Philosophy and the Politics of Meaning* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), 9.

Conclusion

Marriage files and other Catholic parish records are the richest sources for studying the experience of Africans and their descendants in colonial Latin America. They offer a unique window onto the lives of the first generation of slaves and free blacks arriving in colonial Montevideo, about which much less is known than those who arrived after 1790. These materials are not easy to use, and analysis of depositions in marriage files must be accompanied by a full explanation of methodologies and strategies of research. Testimonies can neither be taken for granted nor discarded as a mere creation of the Catholic Church or the colonial regime. A comparative and comprehensive work on how slaves and freedmen left their mark in these records is waiting to be written, given the existence of marriage files produced in Mexico, Cuba, and Brazil.

Shipmate experiences in the slave trade were crucial for the formation of social networks for Africans in the New World. This article not only shows Africans relying on ties developed in the slave trade but also raises new questions about how these social networks shaped African identities. It also allows us to explain how social networks and identities emerged and intertwined in the New World after the constraints of the forced transatlantic passage. Among Africans, shipmate ties helped to bridge ethnic differences in the Americas. The early emergence and persistence of umbrella terms such as *Angola* and *Mina* throughout the New World, and the constant usage of these terms by African diasporic communities, suggest that such categories reflected personal experience in the slave trade. This article connects shipmate networks with these African eponyms. While shipmate ties usually fostered solidarity among captives who shared broad regions of origin, we also see such networks emerging even among captives from disparate broad origins who had sailed together in slave voyages from Brazil to Montevideo or had met before in the slave ports of the Americas. Shipmates' stories contribute to our understanding of the effects of forced displacement. Transformations of social networks and identities started well before slave disembarkation in the New World and extended as far back as the inland African slave trade. Thus, specific slave trading routes did matter in shaping African social networks and identities in the Americas.