

Slavery in New France - Misconceptions, Misunderstandings, and Myths  
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Charles Bird King – 1821 – *Young Omahaw, War Eagle, Little Missouri, and Pawnees* – courtesy of the Smithsonian American Art Museum: <http://americanart.si.edu/collections/search/artwork/?id=13740>

### Historical Facts about Slavery

- Slavery has been in existence for centuries. For example, Moses demanded that the Egyptian pharaoh release the Israelites from slavery
- African tribes enslaved members of other tribes long before slaves were captured and brought to North America
- Native American tribes captured members of other tribes during raids or battles long before the French arrived in North America

### Bibliography for Researching Slavery in New France

#### Primary Sources:

- Original Parish, Notary, and Census Records

#### Secondary Sources:

- Marcel Trudel with collaboration of Micheline D'Aillaire, *Deux siècles d'esclavage au Québec* and *Dictionnaire Des Esclaves et De Leurs Propriétaires au Canada Français* (Montréal: Éditions Hurtubise, HMH ltée, 2004) – some of the slave owners have been misidentified

- Marcel Trudel and George Tombs (translator), *Canada's Forgotten Slaves – Two Centuries of Bondage* (Montréal: Véhicule Press: 2013)
- Virtual Museum of New France: Slavery: <http://www.historymuseum.ca/virtual-museum-of-new-france/population/slavery/>

**An unreliable book about slavery in New France:** *Bonds of Alliance* by Brett Rushforth. See Suzanne Boivin Sommerville's book review about this book on the Book Review Page on the FCHSM website: [http://www.habitantheritage.org/french-canadian\\_resources/book\\_reviews](http://www.habitantheritage.org/french-canadian_resources/book_reviews)

### **Slavery in the Mississippi Valley – Sources**

- Carl J. Ekberg, *French Roots in the Illinois Country – The Mississippi Frontier in Colonial Times* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998)
- Carl J. Ekberg, *Stealing Indian Women – Native Slavery in the Illinois Country* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2010 edition)
- Carl J. Ekberg, *Colonial Ste. Genevieve – An Adventure on the Mississippi Frontier* (Tucson, Arizona: The Patrice Press, 1996)
- Carl J. Ekberg and Sharon K. Person, *St. Louis Rising – the French Regime of Louis St. Ange de Bellerive* (Urbana, Chicago, and Springfield, Illinois: University of Illinois Press: 2015)

### **Misconceptions and Facts about Slavery in New France**

**Misconception:** Slavery in New France was similar to the United States, especially Southern plantation slavery.

**Facts:** Even in the Mississippi Valley where agricultural holdings were much larger than the rest of New France, the extent of the holdings and the number of slaves were much smaller than in the Southern plantations

“... in general the *habitants* were out there in the grain fields working shoulder to shoulder with their slaves.” Carl J. Ekberg, *French Roots in the Illinois Country*, p. 141

The largest slave owners in 1752 (Ekberg, p. 153): Jesuits in Kaskaskia 34; Seminary of Foreign Missions in Cahokia 19; and Antoine Bienvenu: 55 at his residence in Kaskaskia and 10 at his plantation near Prairie du Rocher.

Antoine Bienvenu “was the only slaveholder in French Illinois who operated large slave-worked agricultural enterprises” similar to the plantations in the southern United States (Ekberg, p. 153).

**Misconception:** The *Code Noir* applied to all areas of New France

**Facts:** from Carl J. Ekberg, *French Roots in the Illinois Country*, p. 147

1. Louis XIV promulgated the *Code Noir* in 1685 to regulate slavery in the Caribbean.
2. The *Code Noir* was reissued in French Louisiana in 1724.

### **Misunderstandings about Catholicism**

**Misunderstanding:** Slave owners baptized their slaves.

**Fact:** Except in the case of a person who was in immediate danger of death, Catholics did not baptize anyone.

**Misunderstanding:** French Canadians insulted slaves and Native Americans by burying them without a name.

**Fact:** Generally speaking, individuals (French Canadians, Native Americans, or Slaves) buried without a name were infants who had been stillborn.

**Misunderstanding:** French Canadians “stole” the identity of Native Americans by changing their names.

**Facts:** Anyone who is baptized as a Catholic must have a Saint’s name as part of their name. Many Native Americans used different names at different points in their lives.

### **Many Slaves in New France were freed verbally**

Following is the concluding paragraph of a letter by Charles de Beauharnois, *marquis* de Beauharnois, Governor General of New France, and Gilles Hocquart, Intendant of New France to Minister Maurepas in France, 4 October 1733:

"Ordinarily, owners of *Panis* slaves, after having obtained service from them for several years, free them verbally. It would be useful, to assure their status, if this were done in front of a notary." Source document: French National Archives, Outre Mer, Aix-en-Provence, C11A vol. 59:108-112) (courtesy of Suzanne Boivin Sommerville).

See the articles on this page by Gail Moreau-DesHarnais and Suzanne Boivin Sommerville regarding slave owners who freed their slaves. Also see the profile of Pierre Chesne *dit* Labutte for another example of an individual who freed one of his slaves.

### **Tribal Origins of Slaves in Détroit**

#### **As a general rule they came from Tribes that were enemies of New France’s Allies**

Listed in alphabetical order

Cahokia – possibly a gift

Chickasaw (*Chicacha, Chicachase*)

Flat Head (*Tête Plate*)

Fox (*Outagami, Outagamise, Renard, Renarde*)

Mascoutin – Allies of the Fox

Natchez (*Natchée*)

Pawnee (*Panis or Panisse*)

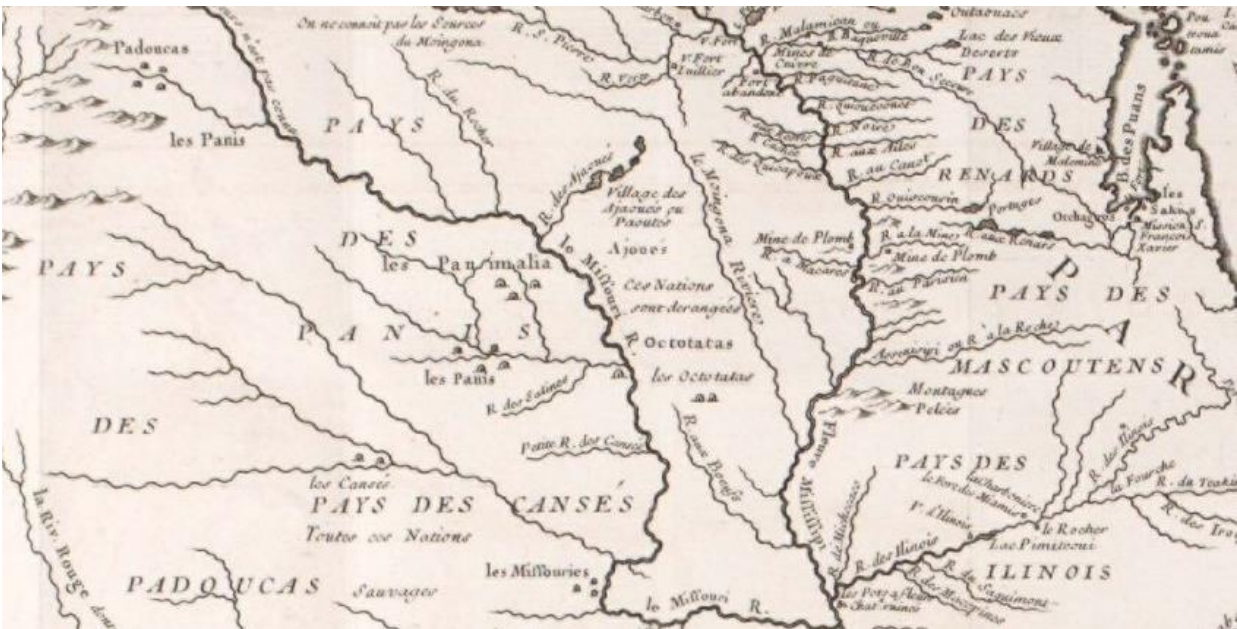
Plains Apache (*Padouca, Patoca*)

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Jean Baptiste Nolin (1686-1762) 1656 map - *Carte du Canada et de la Louisiane qui forment la Nouvelle France, et des colonies anglaises*



Detail from the Preceding Map



Fox (*Renard*), Pawnee (*Panis*), and Plains Apache (*Padouca*)

### Facts about Ste. Anne's Parish Records

- Prior to the opening of the Huron Mission (Notre-Dame-de-l'Assomption among the Hurons) by Armand de La Richardie, S.J., in 1728, Ste. Anne's served everyone in the area, regardless of their origin. See Suzanne Boivin Sommerville's article "Bob-Lo" Island, the Huron, and the French Canadians on the Detroit River Region Page on our website: [http://www.habitantheritage.org/french-canadian\\_resources/detroit\\_river\\_region](http://www.habitantheritage.org/french-canadian_resources/detroit_river_region)
- After 1728, all other Native Americans were considered members of Ste. Anne's Parish.
- Misunderstandings about the fact that non Hurons were considered members of Ste. Anne's probably led Trudel to classify as slaves any Native American appearing in the records. Some of these individuals were Native Americans living in the area (including those living in the homes of French Canadians); others may have been freed slaves.

### Slavery in Détroit through 1762 – the facts and the people

#### Slave Owners Prior to the Fox attack on Fort Pontchartrain in 1712:

Michel Bisailon, René Cuillerier, Robert Janot *dit* Lachapelle, Antoine Lamothe, *sieur* de Cadillac; Antoine Magnan, Joseph Parent, Pierre Richard, Pierre Roy, Joseph Senécal, Jean Verger *dit* Desjardins

#### Slave Owners who adopted or redeemed Fox or Mascoutin Indians after the May 1712 attack on Fort Pontchartrain:

Jacques Cardinal, Pierre Chesne *dit* Saint-Onge, René Cuillerier,  *fils*, François Fafard *dit* Delorme, Pierre Gareau *dit* Saint-Onge, Louis Gatineau *dit* Duplessis, Jean Baptiste Goyau, Jacques Hubert *dit* Lacroix, François Rivard, Jean Verger *dit* Desjardins

#### Slave Owners Enumerated in the 1750 Census (slave owners who did not have any land under cultivation are marked with an \*)

**Owner of 3 slaves:** Jean Louis Campeau

**Owners of 2 slaves:** Charles Chauvin, Charles Chesne, \*Louis Césaire Dagneau *dit* Dequindre, Pierre Descompt *dit* Labadie, Laurent Eustache Gamelin, \*Gilles Parent

**Owners of 1 slave:** Claude Campeau, Jean Cécire, \*Pierre Chesne *dit* Labutte, Pierre Cosme, Antoine Cuillerier, Jean Baptiste Cuillerier, \*Guillaume Dagneau *dit* Lamothe, \*Jacques Godefroy, Claude Thomas Gouin, Pierre Huyet *dit* Champagne, \*François Janis, Claude Landry, François Marsac, François Meloche, Antoine Mesny, Zacharie Sicot/Cicot, \*Alexis Trottier *dit* DesRuisseaux, Jean Unknown

#### Slave Owners Enumerated in the 1762 Census (slave owners whose sole property was in the fort are marked with an \*)

**Owners of 5 slaves:** Claude Thomas Gouin, Zacharie Sicot/Cicot

**Owners of 3 slaves:** Jean Louis Campeau, Claude Landry

**Owners of 2 slaves:** Antoine Cuillierier, Jean Baptiste Cuillierier, \*Louis Césaire Dagneau *dit* Dequindre, François Meloche

**Owners of 1 slave:** \*Jean Cécire, Charles Chauvin, \*Pierre Chesne *dit* Labutte, Pierre Descompt *dit* Labadie, Laurent Eustache Gamelin, François Marsac, Catherine Sauvage (widow of Charles Chesne), \*Alexis Trottier *dit* DesRuisseaux

**1762 Slave Owners Listed by Selected Occupations:**

**Merchants:** Jacques Baby, Charles Barthe, Jacques Baby, Jean Baptiste Chapoton,  *fils*, Pierre Chesne  *dit* Labutte,  *père*, Pierre Chesne  *dit* Labutte,  *fils*, Louis Césaire Dagneau  *dit* Dequindre, Joseph Douaire Bondy, Laurent Eustache Gamelin, François Godé, Claude Thomas Gouin, François Meloche, Hyacinthe Réaume, Pierre Réaume, Zacharie Sicot/Cicot, Alexis Trottier  *dit* DesRuisseaux

**Blacksmiths:** Jean Cécire, Charles Chauvin, Nicolas Vernet  *dit* Bourguignon

**Interpreters:** Jacques Beaudry  *dit* Desbuttes, Pierre Chesne  *dit* Labutte,  *père*

**Slave owners not already listed:**

**Note that the Huron as well as the Ottawa were recorded as owning slaves.**

Pierre Joseph d'Ailleboust  *dit* Mantet, Jean Baptiste Henri Bérenger, Guillaume Bernard, Louis Charles Blondeau, Antoine Campeau, Jacques Campeau (d. 1751), Michel Campeau, Pierre Cardinal, Jean Baptiste Chapoton,  *père*, Gilles Chauvin, Unknown Clapham, Pierre Cosme,  *fils*, Charles Denis Courtois, Pierre Estève, Michel Fily  *dit* Kerigou, Ignace Gamelin, Simon Gendron, **Huron Tribe**, Ignace Jean  *dit* Vien, Landriau, François Leduc, Bonaventure Léonard, Pierre Mallet, Pierre Meloche, Nicolas Charles de Noyelles, **Ottawa Tribe**, Jean Baptiste Petit  *dit* Milhomme, François Roy, Alphonse Tonty

**A Specific Assumption and Myth about Slavery in the Detroit River Region**

**Assumption:** “A 1762 census for Detroit indicates that 65 of the approximately 900 people living near the fort were African American slaves.” Susan Sleeper Smith, *Indian Women and French Men*, p. 60.

**Facts:** The 1750 and 1762 census did not list the race of the slaves in the area.

**Owners of African American Slaves through 1762:**

- Jean Louis Campeau was the owner of a female African American who gave birth to four children.
- Pierre Chesne  *dit* Labutte,  *fils*, owned Jacquot, a male African American.
- Guillaume Dagneau  *dit* Lamothe and Louis Landriau owned Joseph Hippolyte, an African American who married Marie, an African American also owned by Lamothe and Landriau. The couple had one daughter.
- Marie Suzanne Richard (widow of Albert Parent) was the owner of Charles, a male African American who married Marie Marguerite, a  *panisse* owned by Claude Landry. The couple had three children.

**Myth:** Slave Owners in New France purchased their slaves

**Facts:** French Canadians obtained their slaves in a number of different ways, including the following:

- Purchase, although “auctions” were generally limited to the Mississippi Valley
- Gift from a Native American in an official or unofficial capacity
- Redemption of slaves or prisoners held by Native Americans
- Inheritance
- Many slaves noted in the parish records and census were the children of slaves; therefore, they could not be said to have been purchased