

**Mellon/ACLS Community College Faculty
Fellows Sample proposal from previous awardee**

This document contains selected portions of an application previously awarded support through the Mellon/ACLS Community College Faculty Fellows program. We share this not as a model, but as one example of how to organize a successful proposal. The projects supported through the Mellon/ACLS Community College Faculty Fellows program represent a wide range of methodologies, subjects, time periods, and geographies. Individual submissions will therefore take up an array of formats, as unique as the proposals themselves.

Please note: this document represents only the five-page narrative proposal and does not include the project timeline with budget estimates; for additional guidance please consult our timeline and budget sample which can be found on the program page here: <https://www.acls.org/Competitions-and-Deadlines/Mellon-ACLS-Community-College-Faculty-Fellowships>

Project Title: "Tobacco as Freedom: Cuban Slavery and Self-Purchase in the Nineteenth-Century"

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Overview, Research and Contribution: Writing during the middle of the nineteenth century, John Taylor, an English traveler who was also a slaveholder during his residency in Cuba, observed “a slave who had no spare time except feast days and working days, after his task was over, earn no less a sum, in six months only, than eighty-five dollars, by one crop of tobacco.” Taylor not only described this highly unusual and very specific exchange but also vouched for its veracity as well since he was the one who had purchased the slave’s crop. Nearly a decade later in the same province of Pinar del Río, Cristóbal and Teresa Carabalí, enslaved on a Cuban tobacco farm, filed criminal charges for theft of their property, including an official document declaring Teresa’s status as a *coartada* (a slave having initiated legal self-purchase) as well as a variety of clothes and nine ounces of gold. As an explanation for how they had acquired this sum, the two slaves testified that they had earned the money from selling independent yard production accumulated during their rest hours, traditionally items such as vegetables, eggs and livestock.

Beyond representing a rarely-documented glance into the internal or informal economy among slaves in the tobacco fields of Cuba, these examples illustrate a unique perspective for interpreting Cuban slavery in the nineteenth century, notably the extent to which the enslaved were both bound by their labor regime and to which they resisted that arrangement. On a basic level, slaves’ independent production of subsistence and surplus food, as well as the accumulation of material goods holding economic value, represent just one element of the complexities of slavery. On another level, the presence of an internal economy held for slaves the potential to transform the very nature of enslavement. For slaves throughout the Atlantic, it is impossible to overstate the importance of the internal economy to the material and even psychological conditions of those enslaved. That autonomous activity was happening within the constraints of slavery means that enslaved individuals were using an internal economy to push the boundaries and limitations of their enslavement. Specifically, the existence of an internal economy fundamentally altered the slave experience by creating a role for slaves as independent economic actors, rather than as objects to be exploited and commodities to be bought and sold. Within this relative economic independence, slaves defied the traditional arrangements of power and position thereby altering

the “essential” narrative of enslavement. For many slaves, participating in this economy guaranteed a measure of self-determination far removed from their imposed identity as enslaved laborers.

A central emphasis of my work contends that the unique nature of tobacco cultivation provided the foundation of this internal economy. In the case of tobacco, its labor requirements and routines necessitated comparatively less effort and time from enslaved laborers than other regimes; additionally, slaves had access to dedicated portions of land for internal subsistence and even food surplus, in drastic contrast to sugar production practices. The juxtaposition with sugar, Cuba’s leading plantation crop, is important as I argue, *conucos*, traditional slave-provision plots in Cuba, were increasingly only associated with tobacco estates as the nineteenth century unfolded. Moreover, beyond the labor and economic arrangements dictated by tobacco that facilitated slave yard plots, tobacco’s small scale, low overhead, relative ease of production, and high profit margins also made it an essential component of the slaves’ economy in this region. As an easily grown product with considerable material value, tobacco-based slaves had unique access to a valuable resource that they used to forever change their imposed condition of servitude through self-purchase. Nowhere was this truer than in Pinar del Río, one of the most productive and valuable tobacco growing lands in the world; a region where virtually every man, women and child cultivated tobacco and home to more than 80 percent of all tobacco-based slaves in Cuba.

Extending the focus on the specific structure and nature of cultivation I argue tobacco facilitated higher rates of freedom for these slaves than any other plantation-based economies in Cuba. This argument rests on the principle that the most important expression of slave autonomy generated by an internal economy was the pathway to freedom permitted by the acquisition of material resources. Slave-owned property, in a variety of forms, underlined the institution of *coartación*, a legally recognized process of manumission through gradual self-purchase. It was not easy for Cuban slaves to initiate this process and it was especially difficult for rural slaves whose mobility, time, and access to legal authorities were more limited than they were for slaves in urban areas. However, rural slaves with access to an internal economy could and did initiate the process of *coartación*. The end of slavery in Cuba provides an important illustration of the degree of slave-owned wealth and slaves’ ability to purchase their freedom.

When measured by the percentage of slaves freed by article six, self-indemnification, under the *patronato* system (the apprenticeship arrangement that marked final emancipation in the 1880s) a higher proportion of slaves in Pinar del Río freed themselves when compared to slaves elsewhere on the island.

Despite the important implications of *coartación*, in the specific context of Cuba, scholars have either ignored or undervalued this practice – a result of the long-standing attention paid to urban and sugar slaves at the expense of scholarship on other slave-based agricultural economies. Further marginalization of this practice stems from the reality that archival sources on this subject are scarce, leading many scholars to question both the frequency with which slaves initiated *coartación* and the impact that this status had on slaves. Yet *coartación* remains one of the primary conditions structuring the life of Cuban slaves. And arguably, the most salient aspect of *coartación* is neither the ability of slaves to initiate the process nor concrete numbers of who did so, but rather the life-altering implications of the process. Thus, this proposal contends *coartación* must be analyzed wherever and however it occurred.

Methodology, Work Plan, and Competencies: Building on previous research with notarial and judicial records funding from the Mellon/ACLS will extend this investigation to produce a larger sample set and a more complete examination, cataloging, and analysis of records related to the *coartación* of tobacco-based slaves originating out of Pinar del Río as well as appeals reaching officials in Havana from 1817-1886. Arguing against theories that limit the role of *coartación* in Cuban slavery and that reserve this practice to predominantly urban areas, I will use the specific framework of tobacco slavery to identify additional cases of *coartación* in Pinar del Río. As the overwhelming majority of slaves laboring in this province did so under a tobacco-based regime, *coartación* appeals were intrinsically linked to an internal economy predicated upon tobacco cultivation, a relationship that will further highlight how this particular crop facilitated rates of self-purchase. This research effort will elaborate on this important practice while also addressing the assertions of some scholars that little is known about the use of *coartación* by rural slaves before 1860.” With greater recognition of this practice, this project will correct long-standing and narrow historiographical understanding of the multiple and varying nature of enslavement in Cuba while also expanding comparative developments within the larger field of Atlantic scholarship.

For this project, Mellon/ACLS funding would primarily support a six-week-long research trip to Cuba, divided between two weeks in Havana and the remainder in Pinar del Río. At the Archivo Histórico Provincial de Pinar del Río, primary work will concentrate on the fondo de instituciones judiciales coloniales as it contains over 13,000 files from 1800-1899, the majority of which pertain to slavery, as well as the fondo gobierno provincial as it holds important records related to agriculture and labor during this period. In Havana, principal research will involve the Archivo Nacional de Cuba, in particular, the fondo gobierno superior civil for its administrative and agricultural records of the tobacco economy and the miscelánea de expedientes which hold judicial records covering the appeal cases of slaves challenging their status. Utilizing new archival records detailing slave testimonies ranging from the ownership of material possessions to the initiation of freedom processes this work ultimately re-orientes how scholars interpret the multitude of slave experiences as well as the different expressions of slave life. Proficient in Spanish, with experience working at multiple national and provincial archives, the proposed Mellon/ACLS grant will build upon two previous, exploratory research trips to Cuba (2008, 2011) as well as a recent trip to the Archivo Histórico Nacional, Madrid, Spain, funded by the *Conference on Latin America History's* Lydia Cabrera Award in support of original research (2017-2018). This research has resulted in three peer-reviewed articles and one book chapter in an edited volume.

Final Product and Dissemination: Funding from the Mellon/ACLS will culminate in the publication of *A Different Kind of Servitude: Cuban Tobacco Slavery and Freedom in Pinar Del Río*, currently under contract with Vanderbilt University Press (to be published 2021). Organized into two sections, my manuscript concentrates on Pinar del Río while also situating this region within the larger economies of Cuba and the Atlantic world. A framework privileging crop specificity and determination supports this conceptual scope. As a primary structuring element of enslavement, distinct agricultural practices govern patterns of land use and labor by dictating the parameters of who labored, where they labored, how they labored, and even when they labored. Chapter one outlines tobacco's longstanding association with slavery to explicitly refute the myth of tobacco as a small-scale, family and free-labor crop promoted by both contemporary and current scholarship. Chapter two details the structure of tobacco slave labor and

the previously unrecognized evolution of tobacco farms into large-scale plantations. This chapter presents an original archetype of the Cuban tobacco farmer as a plantation-style owner. It also privileges an underutilized concept of *latifundia*, the general expansion of estate and labor size and capital investment over time, as the principal means to describe tobacco's evolution into a true plantation economy. By reimagining tobacco as a plantation-scale economy, this chapter allows for a larger conversation with emerging studies concerned with the advent of a second slavery (defined by an intensification of new commodity production on the frontiers of the Atlantic world). At its center, this section also rejects the prevailing use of sugar as the model for epitomizing Cuban slavery – a paradigm that obscures the full measure of diversity in this region and era - arguing other slaves existed, other forms of labor were pertinent, and the differences between and the varieties among these slave societies were remarkable.

The second part of *A Different Kind of Servitude* shifts its focus from systemic to human, examining tobacco from the slave perspective and the ways in which slaves took advantage of tobacco's unique labor structure to capitalize on the few opportunities available to them. Evaluating the material conditions unique to Cuban tobacco, this work adds an important investigation of a previously-unexplored slave community to the larger historical understanding of how slaves interacted with, and at times even manipulated, their environment. Chapter three expands recent scholarship on spaces of autonomy and independence for slaves through an extended study of how tobacco's labor structure influenced a more balanced sex and age demography, increased rates of family formation, the use of independent housing structures and comparatively higher degrees of slave mobility. Chapter four examines the internal economy operating within the slave community while chapter five provides a new accounting and analysis of the process of coartación in relation to Cuba's tobacco economy. I have completed drafts of the first three chapters and propose that the Mellon/ACLS support the final phase of research (summer, 2020) and analysis/writing for the two remaining chapters, (fall, 2020). Upon completion of this project I anticipate presenting my work at the annual meetings of the American Historical Association, Latin American Studies Association, and the Agricultural History Society.