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DENMARK VESEY AND THE SLAVE INSURRECTION
TRIAL NARRATIVES:
THE AFRICAN-AMERICAN SOCIAL LANDSCAPE
OF
ANTEBELLUM CHARLESTON, SOUTH CAROLINA

by

Rhonda Christina Goodman

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of the University of Delaware in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Early American Culture

Spring 2000

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ABBREVIATIONS

DTT - documentary trial transcript
SCDAH - South Carolina Department of Archives and History
SCHS - South Carolina Historical Society
The following thesis plots the African-American social landscape of Charleston, South Carolina. The paper discovers how the city's black population manipulated constructed social spaces to accomplish particular objectives.

The trial transcripts from the failed slave revolt led by Denmark Vesey in 1822 serve as the foundation for this examination. Charleston was a prominent slave city dominated by a black majority. The city's white residents constructed buildings and established laws to maintain control. Vesey, a free African-American, organized slaves to overthrow local authorities. How Vesey and his co-conspirators coordinated an uprising that went undetected by white dwellers until a slave informed his master lay at this thesis' core.

The thesis concludes that the trial narratives offer an alternative approach to material culture. The narratives can be contextualized in the wider social
environment and be investigated to the minutest detail. The narratives expose Charleston's outward display of a genteel society to unveil a complex culture.
INTRODUCTION

Monday Gell testified:

Trial of Naphur, Adam, and Bellisle, Friday, July 19, 1822:

"They were all in the habit of coming into my Shop to talk on this business . . . Adam brought to me a long knife to make a scabbard for it, which he intended to use in this business."

Confession of Monday Gell, Tuesday, July 23, 1822:

"Vesey . . . continued to visit the Shop in which I worked - Peter, Ned, Vesey, Frank, Rolla, Adam, Gullah Jack, Jack Purcell and myself, the party at Vesey's, then agreed to enlist as many men as we possibly could. Vesey even then ceased working himself at his Trade and employed himself exclusively in enlisting men."

Trial of Jacob Stagg, Friday, July 26, 1822:

"Jacob agreed to join with my Company in my Shop - he asked me for a Sword . . . Jacob frequented my shop and I have known him for 4 or 5 years."

Trial of Denbow, Friday, July 26, 1822:

"Vesey has met him, and spoke to him in my Shop as one of his men - he was often at my Shop - after Peter Poyas was taken up, he said he was just as much for it as ever."¹
On the surface, the activities mentioned were benign and ordinary, barely worthy of notice. The gatherings, however, were not innocent. Monday Gell's shop was not an ordinary place. The year was 1822, and the city was Charleston, South Carolina, America's "major slaveport" in the antebellum period (Figure 1). The men cited in the testimonies above were African-American slaves. The men were not discussing plans for a religious meeting or social event. They were in the throes of plotting what was to become one of the most organized and complicated slave revolts in American history. The insurrection failed. If the revolt had been victorious, the achievement would have signaled to slaves and their owners around the country that a rebellion could succeed. The conspiracy, led by Denmark Vesey, a free African-American, had been planned for months without any white intervention. Slaves were to seize weapons from armories and shops throughout the city and massacre every white man, woman, and child. Two weeks before the scheduled attack on Sunday, June 16, 1822, however, one slave, Peter Desverney, informed Mr. and Mrs. John Prioleau, his owners, of the plot, and a massive search began for those involved. By the end of the summer and after the court proceedings, 67 men were found guilty -
35 men were hanged and 32 men were deported out of the country.³

Slave resistance is not an unknown phenomenon in historical scholarship. Several works exist that discuss the various ways slaves attempted to gain agency. Some of the efforts included destroying property, acting ignorant of work procedures, and running away.⁴ Those acts pale in comparison to the purported revolt described in the Vesey trial narratives. The testimonies do not merely convey information about how blacks intended to kill Charleston's white residents; they disclose knowledge about how African-Americans worked around the barriers white masters built against them. They demonstrate how space was constructed by one group of people, and manipulated by another. The actions discussed throughout the trial show that Charleston's African-American population was not a group confined completely by the social restrictions that sought to dominate them. Information concerning where they congregated, what streets they walked along, and who met in particular settings reveal that blacks had more autonomy than whites realized. The slaves disclosed "their perceptions, the way they organized their experience, and responded to others. Their stories were articulated within
a frame of reference and a language which was both constituted by and constitutive of their experience." The conspiracy took place in a larger societal context that defined and was defined by the white assumption that slaves and free blacks were content in their lives, and therefore, left whites to become unaware that the real story was quite different (Figure 2).

Although whites thought they had blacks under control, the narratives convey that slaves and freedmen actually exercised agency without alerting whites to their activities. The world of African-Americans and the world of whites existed simultaneously, each extremely mobile, and each connected in a space where both existences were necessary for social mores to develop and ultimately, be manipulated. Yet, the two landscapes occupied different spaces, both fighting for their own values, and both needing that separateness for evolvement. Charleston, thus, becomes a co-conspirator, a major participant in the Vesey plot. The narratives implicate urban space through the thorough and complete knowledge of Charleston's roadways, the slaves' ability to move freely through the streets, the laws that control mobility, and the cultural
and social behavior patterns that regulate interaction between groups of people.

"Implication opens to view much of what we normally term the symbolic; however, it exposes it not by reifying "meaning" in isolated events but by suggesting an open-ended skein of entangled, involved descriptive passages that loop back continually and bring normally latent tissues that tie one referent to another, and another, and another, and . . . into public view."6

The places of collaboration, as discussed throughout the narratives, are implicated spaces because they serve double purposes. The spaces where African-Americans lived and worked were layered with multiple meanings that were shaped on a daily basis depending on the specific activity that took place.

The narratives also display an awareness of the complex relationships between blacks and whites, and the various levels - whites and slaves, whites and free blacks, slaves and free blacks, and slaves and slaves. Charleston's African-American population carved out a landscape that uniquely belonged to them although confined within a white constructed space. Landscapes, thus, are "synthetic" spaces, a series of "man-made systems of spaces superimposed on the face of the land," that function and evolve to serve communities.7
The following thesis explores how the social landscape of antebellum Charleston, South Carolina, was constructed and manipulated to achieve certain goals. The paper discusses how relationships between groups of people - namely the city's black and white residents - were defined and restricted by the spaces they created and experienced. Charleston, in the nineteenth century, was a place that developed "not by chance but by contrivance, by premeditation, by design." By analyzing the transcripts and the testimonies given by participants in the failed plot, this examination teases out webs of social and cultural relationships that emboldened Charleston's slaves to believe they could succeed. The paper exposes Charleston's veneer of an elegant, genteel existence to reveal a city where tension, anger, and fear were ever present.

The trial narratives demonstrate that the black and white landscapes simmered beneath the illusion of a congenial culture until the disclosure of the conspiracy became the catalyst for the tension to boil. The thesis focuses primarily on three sites, Denmark Vesey's house, Monday Gell's shop, and Nathaniel Russell's mansion. The three sites differ because they contain information on
various aspects of African-American life in the antebellum period. Each of the spaces - one private residence of a free black man, one shop in a busy market setting, and the home of a slave owner - reveal black and white attitudes toward those spaces and the various shapes of social interaction. The spaces also possess similarities. The areas are shared spaces where social interaction takes place. They mark the boundaries of private and public. They are void of a white presence or surveillance - direct or indirect. The narratives convey a sense of entitlement and a lack of fear by African Americans - they believed in their right to discuss plans for freedom. The social landscape of Charleston becomes the "human landscape," "our unwitting autobiography," reflecting a culture's tastes, values, aspirations, and fears "in tangible visible form." This essay shows how Denmark Vesey and his co-conspirators exploited the Charleston setting to organize the plot and map out plans for attack.

To understand Charleston, how the city was constructed, and how that space was exploited by those it was meant to control requires a deeper look into Charleston's social and cultural values to fully comprehend how a city became a co-conspirator in a slave rebellion.
The Vesey plot did not occur in the mind of one man who was simply able to encourage slaves to join, but rather the culmination of years of developing social customs and cultural values.

The concepts of embeddedness and thick description permit access to the many cultural attitudes a social landscape can contain. Embeddedness encompasses the qualities of interpreting historical events in relation to the larger social and cultural environment where action and interaction transpire. On the other hand, thick description allows researchers to take a "microscopic" approach to interpreting large historical questions. Instead of drawing the lens out to see the wider perspective, thick description permits the lens to focus on specific events and actions to extrapolate many different meanings to reveal a multilayered view of society. Thick description advocates the use of unorthodox sources such as court transcripts to obtain information that would remain hidden with the use of traditional documents, thereby contributing new interpretations about particular societies. Embeddedness and thick description provide avenues to discover Charleston’s African-American landscape.
through the Vesey trial narratives because the concepts present Charleston from different angles.

Charleston History

Charleston was founded in 1670, as Charles Town. Settled by people of English, Irish, Scottish, and French descent, the small peninsula tucked between the Ashley and Cooper Rivers grew in prominence in the following century due to lucrative crops of rice, indigo, and sea island cotton. The economic growth would not have been possible if not for the presence of slaves. Without the free labor of Africans and their African-American descendents, Charleston would not have become the fourth largest city in the colonies behind Boston, New York, and Philadelphia. With new wealth and prosperity came a social hierarchy that developed into a Charleston class structure, whose leaders were planters and merchants.

The new elite developed a society where the rich "devoted themselves to the arts and the amenities of gracious living," believing that "their disposition was to spend their wealth freely." Attending the theater and musical recitals, holding parties where dancing was the primary form of entertainment, and filling their minds with
the literature of the day established Charlestonians as a people who President George Washington called on his 1796 visit, "wealthy - Gay - & hospitable." Despite its economic prominence and reputation as a "fashionable" and "brilliant society," Charleston was a city where its citizens felt continually under siege from external and internal enemies. In 1704, residents built a wall around Charleston as protection from Native Americans and the Spanish who had colonized Florida (Figure 3). By the second quarter of the eighteenth century, Charleston's citizens feared those that lived within the iron gates of their own homes. Charleston was a city characterized by a black majority (Appendix B). Both blacks and whites were aware of the anxiety slavery engendered. Throughout the colonial period and during the immediate post-Revolutionary War era, resistance in the form of slave revolts occurred along the eastern coast.

Rebellions included a 1712 New York City revolt, resulting in the nine dead whites; a failed uprising that forced the Virginia Lieutenant Governor to require men in Norfolk and Princess Anne Counties to carry guns to church; a 1739 insurrection in Stono, South Carolina, where twenty-five whites were killed; Gabriel Prosser's failed attempt
in 1800 in Richmond; and a suppressed revolt in two parishes thirty-five miles outside New Orleans in 1811. These insurrections and others - many which left whites and blacks dead - fostered fear, not just in the places where revolts had taken place, but in any city where blacks commanded a sizeable portion of the population.  

In addition, blacks were cognizant of prevailing ideas about freedom and democracy that circulated throughout the colonies during the second half of the eighteenth century. Desires were fueled further when Touissant L'Overture led the Haitian Revolution that resulted in the country's independence from France in 1804. Charlestonians were aware that the time was ripe for revolution or insurrection, if blacks had the chance. White Charlestonians built internal walls to ensure that African-Americans did not have the opportunity to revolt. They built structures that provided an elegant, domestic backdrop, and at the same time kept a close eye on their slaves. The single house and the double house were two building types that dominated Charleston's architectural landscape.

While the white families occupied the main house, slaves inhabited the second-floors of outbuildings also
included on the house plot, kitchens, laundry rooms, and carriage houses. In these spaces, whites felt they had their slaves under constant surveillance, especially due to the piazzas built alongside of the main structures. In addition, decorative, wrought-iron gates were installed in front of homes, providing further controls over who had access to the housing compound.21

State laws and city ordinances governed African-American behavior. The badge law of 1800 required slave owners to purchase badges for their hired out slaves, an action meant to limit the number of bondsmen that left the masters' property, and checked their activities.22 Curfews imposed on slaves and free blacks were limited to ten o'clock in the evening during the summer and nine o'clock in the winter. Those who ignored the "thundering drum" that signaled the time restriction risked a whipping and jail time. Other local ordinances regulated clothing, prohibited smoking, and public behavior.23 In 1820, slaves could not purchase their freedom and owners could not emancipate their slaves, due to a state law that prohibited such actions except "by act of the Legislature.

Free blacks were required to carry their manumission papers on their person at all times to prove their status.
The papers were also needed to pass the registration requirements for living in South Carolina, and pay at $2 poll tax for the privilege. Failure to pay the tax resulted in an arrest, and the person involved could be sold into slavery for a specified period, sometimes up to five years. When accused of a crime, free blacks were tried in the same courts as slaves, without legal representation. Free blacks were not judged by a jury of their peers, but by a judicial committee made up of two justices of the peace and several landowners who only needed a simple majority for a conviction. Moreover, they could not serve on juries, nor could they testify against a white person, no matter the crime, strength of testimony, or evidence. Blacks could, however, testify against other blacks. No matter how closely they followed the law, free blacks always ran the risk of being kidnapped and sold into slavery, a condition that did not change until 1837 when laws were created to prohibit such abductions.

The housing structures, state laws, and city ordinances accomplished the task of providing comfort and safety for Charleston's white residents. With controls in place, whites assumed that the independence blacks exhibited were within the boundaries of their rules. Anna
Yates wrote in a letter to her sister during the trials, "the Negroes are not satisfied." Indeed, Charleston's African-Americans were not content with their situation. The trial narratives of the Denmark Vesey 1822 slave conspiracy convey that the city's blacks aspired for lives completely free from white control.27

Reaching Denmark Vesey's Home

The men arrived at Denmark Vesey's home at 20 Bull Street from all over the city that March evening. Monday Gell was relaxing in his home, located in the Neck, when he heard a knock on the door. There he met Vesey's son-in-law who announced Vesey wanted to see him. The two men walked a path where they most likely started at Boundary Street, turned down Coming Street, and rounded the corner at Bull Street. Perault Strohecker left his master, John Strohecker, at the blacksmith shop on Meeting Street. He walked north on Meeting, made a left onto Boundary Street, and turned right on King Street until he reached the shop of Benjamin Hammet, where he met his slave, Bacchus. Having decided earlier in the day when Perault stopped by "to go to Society," the two men walked a route that resembled Monday Gell's. Batteau, Ned, and Rolla Bennett
left their slave quarters on Lynch Street, wandered up
towards Mill Pond, and turned onto Bull Street. Blacksmith
Tom Russell locked the door to his shop on East Bay Street,
and walked a route that probably included Broad, Mazyck,
Beaufain, and Coming Streets. Ship caulker "Gullah" Jack
Pritchard completed his duties at Gadsden's Wharf, and
strode through Ansonborough before reaching Coming Street.28

There is no way to be absolutely certain of the paths
each man employed to reach Vesey's home (Figure 4). What
is clear is that the narratives show how blacks moved
through the Charleston landscape. At the meeting mentioned
above, nearly thirty men departed from several different
environments: their own homes, workplaces where they
labored alongside their owners, their own businesses, and
from their slave quarters. Once on the streets, the men
are not just slaves seeking refuge from white observation.

Their journeys to Denmark Vesey's home accomplished
several goals. First, they conveyed that the streets
became a part of the African-American landscape. The
purpose of their expedition, going to the home of a free
black to discuss a rebellion, transformed their walks from
simple strolls to determined strides. To white residents,
the slave probably looked like men taking a casual stroll.

15
The slaves, however, had a specific goal that makes their movement through the landscape significant because their actions revealed that human behaviors are "impregnated with meaning." The importance of their movement through the Charleston landscape can be understood when placed in context of their overall purpose.

Their individual paths to Denmark Vesey's house also illustrate how the visual changes in the Charleston landscape contributed to African-American agency. Although some slaves such as Monday Gell "lived-out" in the Charleston Neck, a section of town outside the city limits north of Boundary Street, many came from the main section of the city. They walked through neighborhoods characterized by two- to three-story homes made of brick. Developed during the first half of the eighteenth century, the exclusive neighborhoods south of Queen Street were the homes of many of Charleston's wealthy planters, merchants, and bankers. Although most blacks and whites lived together throughout the city, most free African Americans could not afford to live in the more expensive sections of town. As the rebels walked through the city's commercial district, Meeting and King Streets, they moved to a section of the landscape where the homes take a different shape.
More homes are made out of wood, a less expensive alternative to brick. In the Harleston district, where Vesey's house is located, more than half of the homes were made of wood, a sharp contrast to homes further south.\textsuperscript{32} Opportunities to build homes made of wood were strong incentives for free African-Americans to live north of the city. The most prominent African-Americans lived on Coming Street, above and below Boundary Street.\textsuperscript{33}

Although pushed to the periphery of Charleston society, free blacks utilized spaces away from the city center as a means to reach their goals. They owned property, saved their earnings, and "by dint of industry and frugality," acquired "a degree of respectability," despite living in an era where the "free Negro" was "considered a quasi-citizen at best."\textsuperscript{34} Free blacks formed an existence that revolved around religious life, schools, aid societies, social groups such as the Brown Fellowship Society, and their occupations - barbers, coopers, tailors, cabinet makers, carpenters, shoemakers, draymen, and wheelwrights.\textsuperscript{35} Blacks and whites lived in a cultural "mosaic," however, socially they "were careful to partition it by color and class."\textsuperscript{36}
Vesey's Bull Street home was an anomaly in his neighborhood (Figure 5). Although made of wood like most of the other structures on the street, Vesey's house had only one floor where other homes on the road had two stories. The two-room building included a piazza constructed along one side the house.37

The thirty men crowded into Vesey's one-story, two-room wooden home (Figure 6).38 Some stood against the wall, others sat on the floor, and others sat in chairs around a table that Vesey, as a skilled carpenter, would have provided. The discussion focused on the conspiracy. They plotted plans for attack, places to recruit more fighters, and finalized the date for the rebellion. Frank Ferguson informed the group that a recent trip to the country resulted in slaves at four plantations agreeing to join. Conversations also centered on obtaining weapons. Rolla Bennett said in his testimony, "That night at Vesey's we determined to have arms made and each man put in 12 1/2 cents for that purpose . . . at this meeting Vesey said, we were to take the Guard House and the Magazine to get arms - that we ought to rise up & speak & he read to us from the Bible, how the children of Israel were delivered out of Egypt from bondage."39 In addition, they complained about
the current state of their lives and agreed that they should do whatever was necessary to change their situation. Bacchus Hammet said that one point during the meeting, Vesey and Perault Strohecker pulled him into another room. When he balked at joining the revolt, Vesey told him that "the one that did not wish to join the Society must be put to death as an enemy." Subsequently, Bacchus Hammet obtained gunpowder for the revolt. Monday Gell said Vesey was to be feared, a person who "was considered by the whole party as a man of great capacity and was also thought to possess a bloody disposition." 40

Denmark Vesey was determined to help enslaved blacks. Although offered the opportunity to leave Charleston to go to Liberia, he declined because he wanted to "see what he could do for his fellow creatures." 41 A native of St. Thomas and brought to Charleston as a slave, Vesey purchased his freedom in January 1800 with money from a lottery prize and became a prominent and respected carpenter in good financial standing. 42 When Vesey was initially charged for his involvement in the conspiracy, the charge was immediately dismissed. He was arrested, however, when the evidence mounted against him. 43 At his sentencing, his executioners stated that they could not
"imagine what infatuation could have prompted [him] to attempt an enterprise so wild and visionary." 

The foundations for his ideology were set during his youth. Serving as a cabin boy to his former owner, Captain Joseph Vesey, Denmark witnessed the horrors of the African slave trade first hand throughout his travels. By the time he purchased his freedom, Vesey hated slavery. His repulsion for the institution was further fueled as he became deeply entrenched in the abolitionist ideas circulating in the North and the issues surrounding the Missouri Compromise.

An extremely educated man who could read, write, and speak several languages, Vesey used his knowledge to inspire others to join his cause for freedom. He was seen as "a charismatic figure that genuinely embodied their aspirations and articulated their beliefs as people of African descent captive in the New World.

Vesey could draw on his own fund of memories, recollections, and stories. Accordingly, he no doubt recognized that to challenge authority successfully, people must look at themselves and the world in which they live in new and critical ways. He also understood that violence was an integral part of any such movement. Vesey offered those willing to listen a way to remove themselves from the clutches of domination and to appraise the world in which they lived with a more penetrating eye."
Vesey's house was an appropriate space to hold conversations about the impending conspiracy. Free blacks and slaves were bound by color, family, marriage, and friendships, and thus, could talk openly amongst themselves when away from white gazes. Vesey and his co-conspirators, however, were mindful of outside regulations. Bacchus Hammett noted that the meeting took place before nine o'clock, the curfew imposed on all blacks during the winter months. Even though whites were absent from the space, certain rules permeated Vesey's walls. On the other hand, the insurgents realized that continuing to faithfully follow the rules would hold back suspicion concerning their conduct. Vesey's home, however, was a crucial element in the African American social landscape. In this space, a free black man could be seen as more than a servant. Vesey comprehended the social, cultural and political customs of the day to fashion "hidden transcript," a world rooted in Charleston society, yet kept away from direct white gaze. Denmark Vesey used his home, not for social gatherings, but to choose leaders, organize men into companies, collect money, and plot a method for attack, conveying that within enclosed walls, multiple meanings reverberated.
The Slave Work Environment

The hiring-out system expanded slaves' use in the South. Masters who owned more slaves than they utilized in their businesses or homes hired out the extra to outside employers. Slaves were employed as carpenters, blacksmiths, bricklayers, tailors, draymen, cabinetmakers, coopers, and butchers. For a set fee, which varied according to current wage levels and prevailing prices for slaves, bondsmen labored for employers for a specified period of time. Many masters permitted their slaves to hire out their own time. Whatever wages they earned, a portion had to be turned over to their masters. Their skills were not "viewed as an individual right, but as a collective one." Owners found the system profitable, as long as their slaves worked hard and proved trustworthy. The system had advantages for slaves as well. Hired-out slaves gained a great deal of independence as they were removed from the direct supervision of their owners. The autonomy enabled enslaved peoples to exercise agency because they developed a separate identity "in a state of industrial freedom."

Monday Gell was a slave who ran his own harness shop on Meeting Street (Figure 7). Regarded as a "most excellent
harness maker," Monday enjoyed "all the substantial comforts of a free man." He kept a large portion of his profits and he lived away from his owner. His master, John Gell, who ran a livery stable on 127 Church Street, "indulged and trusted" his slave. He permitted Monday to keep his "arms and sometimes his money."

From the beginning, the Meeting Street location was the site of most gatherings concerning the Vesey plot because the risks of whites overhearing their plans were minimal. Monday Gell's shop was largely void of a white presence. The meetings about the conspiracy were not conducted in hushed tones. Rather, they were discussed openly. Monday Gell testified that he first heard of the plot in December of 1821 when Vesey "passed by my door and called in and said to me that he was trying to gather the blacks to try to see if anything could be done to overcome the whites." At no point does Monday Gell indicate that Vesey whispered the plans. Vesey called from the door, conveying a lack of fear of being heard. Throughout the narratives, witnesses utilized Monday Gell's shop for a variety of purposes (Figure 8). He recalled forty-two insurgents who spent time in his shop "for the purpose of combining and confederating in the intended insurrection."
Monday Gell's shop was a hiding place. Perault Strohecker and Bacchus Hammet hid a keg of powder in Gell's shop. Strohecker also testified that he "saw 6 pike heads at Monday Gell's Shop - 3 of them were Spears . . . and 3 bayonets with holes to put poles in." Some rebels confirmed their allegiance to the plot such as William Palmer, who told Vesey in the shop that, "he is engaged in the insurrection . . . that Vesey must not think that he would not fight - that he would fight as well as any other." The insurgents reaffirmed their motivations for the conspiracy when John Enslow remembered in a meeting that included Naphur, Adam, and Bellisle Yates. "We all agreed to rise against the Whites and fight for our freedom." 55

That slaves met openly in Monday Gell's shop throughout the day would not have surprised most whites. Many slaves were in occupations that kept them on the city streets such as drayman Smart Anderson, or coachman Isaac Harth (Figure 9). Others worked in close proximity to their owners such as Harry and Nero Haig, who labored in their owner's Meeting Street cooper shop, and were probably sent on errands. The meetings in Monday Gell's shop convey that blacks were extremely mobile throughout the day. In addition, Meeting Street was an extremely busy avenue,
especially near the market on Market Street. According to the 1822 directory, Meeting Street contained 111 businesses that included grocers, bricklayers, stonemasons, coopers, gunsmiths, bakers, carpenters, coachmakers, shoemakers, and wheelwrights. Free blacks ran eight of the Meeting Street shops, including William Pincel, a tin plate worker who advised Peter Desverney's to warn his owners about the Vesey plot. By the third quarter of the eighteenth century, blacks dominated the meat and fish markets, infiltrated artisan trades, and had a commanding presence in maritime centered areas (Figure 10). African-Americans, thus, "did dominate street life."

Whites, no doubt, conducted business in Monday Gell's shop. The narratives indicate, however, that white patrons never questioned the business that occurred in that space. As a well-known and respected slave, Monday Gell was above suspicion. According to the narratives, whites do not play a significant role in Monday Gell's work environment. His shop was "a world of tangible objects and physical processes, but it was also a place of creative thought." Monday Gell's shop contained two landscapes. The surface layer was the environment where whites operated, one which enabled an extremely loyal slave to run his own business.
Underneath the exterior was the African-American landscape, the place where blacks asserted their independence.

Tom Russell was another slave who exercised agency in the workplace. Owned by the prominent Russell family, Tom was a skilled blacksmith who ran a shop on East Bay Street. A key figure in the revolt, Tom made many of the weapons that were to be utilized in the fight. His shop was another space whites did not often visit. Instead of making the weapons piecemeal over a period of time, he stopped conducting business with the local community and devoted his time to the revolt. John Enslow testified that at one of Vesey's house meeting, Vesey referred to a blacksmith, probably Tom Russell. According to Enslow, Vesey said, "100 pikes were made by a black man who worked by himself," and requested those in attendance give money to "pay [his] wages to his mistress." Tom performed his duties, and no one questioned his actions. James Mall, who sometimes worked in Russell's shop testified, "one day I went to his shop, I saw him making a knife about a foot long, out of a file, which he had not finished." In this space, an African-American took possession of his talents. Moreover, Tom Russell possessed a "property of skill," an attitude that was "deeply embedded in the culture and
consciousness of the artisan." Space not only became a place where African-American slaves could plot rebellions. The narratives convey that workplace also became a location where a slave could take possession of his own identity.

Language was an additional tactic used to plan the insurrection. Some African-Americans such as Gullah Jack and Tom Russell spoke of the plot in Gullah, a derivative of English and African languages. James Mall asserted that Gullah Jack visited Tom’s shop, "and they frequently talked together in Gullah so that I should not understand them." White Americans of the period who heard blacks conversing in Gullah believed that blacks were ignorant because they "could not speak proper English." In fact, most Charlestonians believed that Gullah was an inferior attempt by "a savage and primitive people [to] endeavor to acquire for themselves the highly organized language of a very highly civilized race." In Tom Russell's workshop, blacks took advantage of the assumption of their ignorance to plot right before white eyes. Therefore, portions of the conspiracy were conducted in plain sight. The social interaction is both "expressive" and "instrumental." The slaves' actions are expressive because they externalize "one's inner states," their internal beliefs about their
lives. The behavior is instrumental because they "embodied purposes beyond the immediate gratifications" that arose from successful communication. These daily interactions were empowering for African-Americans because they expressed verbally their mental thoughts, and make plans to act on them.

Some meetings were conducted outside. Streets and alleys, gathering places for African Americans to socialize, transport themselves to work, run errands, and buy and sell good, became spaces of collaboration. They met in small ensembles of two to four people, not in large numbers as they could at Denmark Vesey's home, so as not to attract attention. Robert Harth testified that he and Peter Poyas once conversed on the plot at the corner of Lamboll and Legare Streets, and later met with Ned Bennett on the same corner to pledge his allegiance. Blacks blended in with the surroundings, and moved through Charleston "inconspicuously, organizing rebellion virtually unseen." The narratives indicate slaves used their work time to make social plans, gossip, and relate information. Work is, therefore, "embedded in a variety of structures from which [culture] takes its organization and meaning." The structure of that work life was a system that bound
blacks to whites - an organization understood by both
groups. The meaning for each group, however, was
different. For masters, working slaves meant more money in
their pockets. For African Americans, work was an
opportunity to carve out independence and devise plans to
determine their destiny.

The Slave Home World

The home environment of the slave became another place
where power was challenged. Although whites owned the land
and set the standards for interaction, blacks found agency.
The home compounds were "places of captivity, and
"simultaneously . . . seedbeds for further slave
initiative." The home world was the master's landscape, a
place where they imposed their will and presumed
surveillance. Architecture became more than walls meant to
provide shelter. Buildings became "evocative tools for
symbolizing communities and politics." The houses, the
support structures that accompanied them, the piazzas built
along the sides, and the iron gates that surrounded the
compound were designed to maintain control. While whites
assumed that control, the narratives illustrate how slaves
manipulated the architectural setting to assert their own
independence. The buildings tell two stories that are both "struggle[s] for cultural authority." The narratives convey that the home world was a contested space where the "material conditions and symbolic systems [were] intimately connected." The shared landscape conveyed two levels of meaning, one where whites maintained power and one where blacks worked to manipulate that authority. The home compound, thus, was "a kind of dueling ground upon which the relative strength of black and white cultural values were tested."

Testifying for Sarah Russell, Mrs. Mark Marks relayed that Mrs. Russell "cautioned" her slave, Tom, not to associate with Gullah Jack. Apparently, Gullah Jack "was constantly with Tom at breakfast, dinner, and supper." Born a conjurer and a physician in Angola, Gullah Jack had a poor reputation in Charleston. Unlike Monday Gell who had a spotless character, Gullah Jack was described as someone who "altho' he had been fifteen or twenty years in this country . . . he appeared to be untouched by the influences of civilized life" and "sustained a bad character." Known as Tom's "amour," Gullah Jack had practiced his "arts" since he came to America. The word "caution" was the key word in Sarah Russell's testimony.
Tom Russell, unlike Monday Gell who did not live on his masters' premises, lived in the Russell's Meeting Street compound. She observed Gullah Jack on her property, and no doubt, he and Tom talked about the conspiracy in Tom's quarters. Sarah Russell did not order Tom to stop spending time with Gullah Jack, and she did not command Jack to stay off her property, both actions that as a master and landowner she had a right to do. Instead, she "cautioned Tom not to have so much to do with Jack." \textsuperscript{78}

Even in the eighteenth century, some Charleston masters had trouble controlling their slaves. One owner reported that one of his slaves told him that "he can go when he pleases, and I can do nothing to him." Another owner said the bravado of his bondsman irritated him when the slave said "that he will be free, that he will serve no Man, and that he will be conquered or governed by no man." \textsuperscript{79}

The interaction between Sarah Russell and her slave, Tom, conveyed that the relationship between master and slave was not sharply defined. The interplay between the two communicated that both were operating within particular frames of reference that oriented each other to share, exchange and contest meaning. \textsuperscript{80}
Sarah Russell and her husband, Nathaniel, a prominent merchant from New England who amassed a fortune in Charleston, moved into their newly constructed home in 1808 (Figure 11). The three-story, Neoclassical structure included a rectangular, an oval, and a square room on each floor. Although the structure did not have a piazza along the side common to most Charleston homes, wrought iron balconies graced the front and sides of the building— the one in front was adorned with Nathaniel Russell's initials and the one on the side overlooked the garden (Figure 12). Behind the house was a connected laundry facility, a two-story kitchen, and a carriage house. Tom and the other five slaves on the property inhabited the second floors of those buildings. To enter the property, most visitors came through an iron gate, and entered the front door where the hall contained a beautiful spiral staircase. The ritual involved to enter the elaborately constructed house was a form of social control that attempted to accomplish several goals. First, the home's physical appearance — the building, balcony, and staircase — established the Russells among Charleston's most distinguished families. Second, the barriers constructed to cross the threshold alerted the city's residents that access to the Russell property was
not easy. Guests determined their social standing with the Russells by how far they were allowed to enter the "processional landscape." The system was also meant to inform slaves who was dominant. Blacks were only permitted to enter the main house from a servant position, and never through the front door. The spacious rooms, luxurious furnishings, and expensive decorative objects were reminders to slaves, who lived together in small and unadorned rooms, of their inferior status. The narratives indicate, however, that the ritual did not impress African-Americans or impede their ability to penetrate the property because blacks did not enter through the front door, but through the back gate. Although whites insisted that slaves enter the property from the back alley to keep them in a subservient position, African-Americans exploited that action to plan the Vesey revolt. Slaves circumvented the processional entrance and thus, "undercut the social statement made by the formal approach." The white residential world was on the main street. The slaves' environment existed in the work yard (Figure 13).

Beyond the rear entrance was a slave world that remained separate from their owners. Slaves prepared meals, cleaned laundry, fetched water, kept the horses,
shoveled animal waste from the carriage houses, and performed a host of domestic duties all geared toward the main house's upkeep. The home slave environment was also a place where slaves planned the revolt. When Gullah Jack joined Tom on the Russell property, he walked through the back gate, strolled across the courtyard, and sauntered into the building that contained Tom's room. Although whites claimed to know the actions of their slaves, the narratives convey that masters did not enter the slave quarters in the course of everyday social relations. Most masters observed slaves from their piazzas and back windows, and in the Russell's case, the side iron balcony. The slave quarters added to white arrogance. Bondsmen's quarters were placed close to the main building, with their rooms on the top, second floor, while the Russell's main house had three floors- another subtle and physical design to maintain the social hierarchy. The rooms contained windows that faced the inside of the compound, but not the outside, forcing "slaves to center their activity upon the owner and the owner's place." Considered the "urban equivalent of a plantation," the slave compound design was "concentric, drawing the life of the bondsman inward toward his master."
Andrew Miller testified against the previous statement offered by Perault Strohecker who claimed he met with Billy Robinson in Billy's Elliott Street slave quarters. Miller stated Perault could not have visited Billy's room to discuss the conspiracy because "no can go into [Billy's] room above without passing through my kitchen." The presumed surveillance blinded whites to the fact that action was taking place outside of their view because Perault Strohecker retestified and offered an accurate description of Billy Robinson's room, a version similar to Andrew Miller. In Sarah Russell's case, she mistrusted Gullah Jack, but there is no indication the attitude extended to Tom. Her testimony demonstrates the implicit trust many whites placed in their slaves. The idea that Tom or Billy Robinson would employ their quarters to conspire against whites was inconceivable.

The housing compound, in the white mind, conveyed the message that they were under control. The Vesey revolt serves as a reminder of how architecture defined "relationships - of the self to others, of parts of the community to other people, and of people to their physical and cosmic environments." Tom Russell conveyed through his continued alliance with Gullah Jack that the conduct he
displayed while off the slave compound, making weapons in his shop and conversing in Gullah with whites present, were transferable to the Russell setting because he understood white arrogance about their physical environment and knew how to capitalize on their assumption. The African-American landscape extended into white owned areas, and that embedded landscape was not defined solely by place. Rather, mutual interests characterized the African-American landscape that signified the "deeply conflicted social and economic relationships in which pretended acquiescence alternated with acts of resistance." 89

Conclusion

White Charlestonians were stunned by the revelations revealed during the court trials. Although city officials regulated the amount of information published in the newspapers, rumors abounded. In a letter to her sister, Mary Beach wrote that Denmark Vesey was "said to be a man of superior power of mind and more dangerous for it . . . he deserved to die for the undertaking he had embarked." John Potter in a letter to Langdon Cheves, reported a rumor that Governor Thomas Bennett was to be Rolla's "first victim" and that the statesman's daughter was to be Rolla's
In their correspondence to friends and family around the country, white Charlestonians, relate their shock and sense of betrayal, not only of their black servants, but also of the society they constructed to provide security. Charleston's residents "never again relaxed the outward forms of vigilance."91

In the aftermath of the Vesey trials, the state and the city imposed a series of rigorous laws designed to prevent the circulation of information, ideas, and literature among slaves and free blacks. By December 1822, any free black resident that left the state, for any reason, could not return. The annual residency poll tax was raised from two dollars to fifty dollars for all males between the ages of fifteen and fifty. All free blacks were required to obtain a white guardian who could attest for their conduct. The Negro Seaman Act required that all free blacks who arrived on a ship "from any other state or foreign port . . . be seized and confined in jail until said vessel shall clear out and depart from this state," and further required captains to pay for the imprisonment. South Carolina also prohibited slaves from hiring out their own time, and imposed stiff penalties for owners and employers who ignored the law. Charleston officials
established a municipal guard across the city, and levied a
ten-dollar fee on free blacks who worked in any "Mechanick
trade" to defray the costs of the added protection.
Several homeowners, seeking additional safety, installed
spiked wrought iron, called "chevaux de frise" atop of
existing gates (Figure 14).  

The trial revealed to white Charlestonians that the
safety they felt they created was not indestructible.
The narratives convey that beneath the layer of so-called
invincibility was a group of people who sought to undermine
the existing social system. Through the testimonies of the
conspirators and through a closer examination of three
meeting locations - Vesey's home, Monday Gell's shop, and
Tom Russell's slave quarters - the African-American
landscape became a space void of white gaze and
interference, a place where Charleston's free and enslaved
blacks could speak on dangerous issues. That whites did
not suspect that their slaves would plan a rebellion speaks
to their assumptions that blacks were too simple and
ignorant to conceive a plot with any level of complexity.
But the trial narratives made public for the first time the
slaves' secret lives, revealing the feelings that set the
two groups against each other, and "laid bare the
motivations and rationalizations used by different groups in their social interaction."^93

The trial transcripts offer an alternative approach to understanding Charleston society. Under the theoretical concept of embeddedness, the narratives are placed within Charleston's broader context to reveal how the city's backdrop - laws, architecture, economic and political culture, and social and cultural values - contributed to African-Americans' anger and bitterness towards slavery. Under the thick description model, the close examination of one document, the trial transcript, a source not traditionally utilized to interpret history, brings "a translation of philosophy into tangible features."^94 Their journeys through the city to reach Denmark Vesey's house, the manipulation of work life to plot in Monday Gell's shop, and the maneuvering around the processional rituals to penetrate the Russell home world provide "unfamiliar views of the world," and gives voice to those whose lives have been overlooked by previous historians. The Vesey narratives convey how African-Americans "constructed the world, invested it with meaning, and infused it with emotion."^95
The narratives also implicate Charleston as a co-conspirator. Every aspect of the city's landscape was utilized to plan the rebellion. The structures built on the land, the meaning assigned to those buildings based on materials and location, and the expression of those meanings by the people who inhabited the space through their laws, social values, and cultural morals illustrate how urban space conspires. Vesey and the other insurgents would not have had the essential elements to plot a rebellion if the urban setting did not exist for them to manipulate and reshape. The rebels failed not because of any fault in the strategic logic, but rather the weak psyches of two individuals, Peter Desverneys and William Pencil. The narratives expressed the larger cultural process that extended from Charleston's black and white residents to the society both groups developed. The narratives convey that although whites claimed control, African-Americans were not powerless. They wielded considerable influence. Their presence affected decisions that determined the structures, behaviors, modes of interactions, and legislature, thus revealing that the social hierarchy was not unshakable. The narratives
demonstrate African-Americans working within the larger environment to create their own world.

The word plot was employed loosely throughout the thesis. Each of the word's various definitions apply to the narratives and explains what the accounts communicate. First, plot as a verb means "to plan or contrive secretly." From the many testimonies, the transcript divulges the minutest details about the failed conspiracy from the very first mention of the rebellion, to the sentencing of those found guilty. Second, plot is "a measured piece of land," which has two levels of interpretation when applied to the narratives. The geographical city of Charleston was a place where blacks and whites fought for control. Moreover, the narratives mention specific places where the city's residents negotiated boundaries for their own comfort. Finally, plot is also "the plan or main story." Through the narratives, Denmark Vesey and his co-conspirators do more than relate the facts about the insurrection. The narratives impart the story of Charleston, a place that on the surface appeared refined and extravagant, but underneath was complicated and always on the verge of destruction.
Peter Poyas would have preferred that his fellow rebels take the story of the African-American landscape to their deaths. In the moments before his death, Peter Poyas appealed to those awaiting trial, "Do no open you lips! Die silent, as you shall see me do." But the conspirators did not remain silent. They told their stories, and conveyed more about their lives than they realized. The narratives convey that Charleston's African-Americans did not live the social death slavery engendered. Rather, understanding the dynamic and complex society in which they lived, African-Americans established their own environment, and fought to bring change to their circumstances.
ENDNOTES

1 Testimonies of Monday Gell, DTT, SCDAH; The original trial transcript is located at the South Carolina Department of Archives and History in the Record of the General Assembly, Governors' Messages. Governor Thomas Bennett submitted two versions of the transcript to the state assembly in late 1822. Document A, Copy One, contains testimonies from July 19, 1822 through July 26, 1822. Document B, Copy Two, includes the entire first document and contains testimony from the court proceedings through early August. The transcriptions of both trial documents were reprinted in Edward A. Pearson, Designs Against Charleston: The Trial Record of the Denmark Vesey Slave Conspiracy of 1822. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 165-282.


3 Pearson, 310-311.


12Rosen, 9. Charles Town was named for England's King Charles II (1630-1685), and retained the name between 1670 and 1720. Between 1720 and 1783, the city was called Charlestown, and was incorporated as Charleston in 1783.

13Rosen, 11 & 14. The Ashley and Cooper Rivers were named after Lord Anthony Ashley Cooper, Earl of Shaftesbury (1621-1683), who served as Lord Proprietor. Dutchmen and Portuguese Jews were also among the early settlers, although few in number.

14Rosen, 67.

16 Bowes, 3 & 118.


18 Bowes, 3.

19 Walter J. Fraser, Jr., Charleston! Charleston!: The History of a Southern City, (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1989), 23-27; Rosen, p. 18.

To allow for expansion, the fortifications around Charleston were removed in 1717.


Pearson, Designs Against Charleston, 57.


26 Cooper and McCord, vol. 6, 574.

27 Anna Yates to Elizabeth Yates, July 17, 1822, Elizabeth Yates Papers, SCHS.

28 Examination and Confession of Monday Gell, July 23, 1822, DTT; Confession of Bacchus Hammet to his master, Benjamin Hammet, July 12, 1822, DTT; According to numerous testimonies these men attended the meeting: Ned, Batteau, and Rolla Bennett, Tom Russell, and Gullah Jack. The 1822 directory records John Strohecker's blacksmith shop at 163 Meeting Street, and Benjamin Hammet's shop at King Street Road, Neck Area.


30 Wade, Slavery in the Cities, 62. Masters with too many slaves to provide housing, permitted some slaves to seek lodging for themselves; Boundary Street, now Calhoun Street, was the geographical border between the city and the suburbs until 1848 when the Neck was incorporated into the city.

31 Wards 1, 2, 3, 4: Lines through Meeting Street South Bay to Boundary Street, and through Queen Street from the Cooper to Ashley Rivers. By 1861, there were 749 homes made of brick and 423 made of wood in Wards 1 and 2.

32 Poston, The Buildings of Charleston, 479-482; Vesey's Bull Street house is located in Ward 3, where by 1861, 751 homes were made of wood and 620 were made of brick, See Appendix C.

Taylor, 185; Donald Senese, "The Free Negro and the South Carolina Courts," *South Carolina Historical Magazine* 68 (1967), 140.

Bernard E. Powers, Jr. *Black Charlestonians: A Social History, 1822-1855*, (Fayetteville: The University of Arkansas Press, 1994), 48, 51-52. The Brown Fellowship Society was an exclusive organization among Charleston's free brown elite than began in 1790. See also Curry; Johnson and Roark, 212-213.

Johnson and Roark, 226-227.

The 1822 directory lists Denmark Vesey as living at 20 Bull Street in the city's Harleston District. Now numbered 56 Bull Street, this one-story, Greek Revival-style house is listed as a National Historic Landmark. Vesey rented the house from Peter Trezevant. Recent research dates the home's construction to between 1820 and 1860. The present structure appears to date after the conspiracy. See Poston, 482 & 500; *Charleston News and Courier*, August 23, 1976; Hudgins et al., 219; Pearson, 171.

Testimony of John Enslow, July 20, 1822, DTT.

Testimony of Monday Gell, July 23, 1822, DTT; Testimony of Rolla Bennett, June 25, 1822, DTT.

Confession of Bacchus Hammet, July 12, 1822, DTT; Confession and Examination of Monday Gell, July 23, 1822, DTT.

Testimony of Frank Ferguson, June 27, 1822, DTT.
The exact location of Denmark Vesey's birth is unknown, but he is believed to have been born in 1767 in Africa or St. Thomas. Denmark Vesey first appears in documents as 14 years old on a St. Thomas cargo manifest to St. Domingue in 1781. He narrowly escaped life in the sugar cane fields when a sale to a planter went sour because he was diagnosed with epilepsy that made him unsuitable for work. Denmark's owner, Captain Joseph Vesey, a slave trader, was forced by law to buy back the slave. Denmark Vesey became the Captain's personal slave and traveled with him between 1781 to 1783 before the Captain settled in Charleston. He worked as a hired-out slave when in December 1799, Denmark Vesey won $1,500 in the East Bay Street lottery, and $600 was used to purchase his freedom the following month.


"Sentence on Denmark Vesey, DTT. Vesey was hanged on July 2, 1822.


"Wade, 249.
Confession of Bacchus Hammet, July 12, 1822, DTT. Information concerning the exact date of the meeting is unknown. Monday Gell, in his July 23rd confession, stated that a meeting with a large number of men took place "three months prior to the 16th of June," which would place the meeting in March, a winter month, which coincides with Bacchus' nine o'clock comment.


For information on the role of religion in the Vesey plot, see Note 45, and Douglas R. Edgerton, Why They Did Not Preach Up This Thing": Denmark Vesey and Revolutionary Theology," South Carolina Historical Magazine 100, no. 4 (October 1999): 298-318.


Kennedy and Parker, 29; James Hamilton, Jr. An Account of the Late Intended Insurrection among a Portion of the Blacks of this City, (Charleston: A. E. Miller, 1822), 21.

Kennedy and Parker, 29; Hamilton, 21; Hagy, 80.

Confession of Monday Gell, July 23, 1822, DTT.

Testimony of Perault Strohecker, July 15, 1822, DTT; Testimony of Charles Drayton, July 19, 1822, DTT; Testimony of John Enslow, July 19, 1822, DTT.
In the 1822 Directory, free African-Americans are listed with "FPC," Free Person of Color. Monday Gell and others slaves were not listed in the directory, so there is no way to know the numbers of slaves who ran shops on Meeting Street or Monday Gell's exact location. William Pincel's shop was at 81 Meeting Street.


The Russells were a prominent merchant family who constructed a three-floor home on Meeting Street (House completed in 1808). The Russells and their home will be discussed more thoroughly in the next section.

Testimony of John Enslow, July 20, 1822, DTT.

Testimony of James Mall, July 15, 1822, DTT.

Rule, "The Property of Skill in an Age of Manufacture," 104.


Testimony of James Mall, July 15, 1822, DTT.

Joyner, '" If you Ain't Got No Education': Slave Language and Slave Thought in Antebellum Charleston," 257-258.


Testimony of Robert Harth, June 21, 1822, DTT.
68 Pearson, 55.


71 Upton, Architecture in the United States, 58.

72 Upton, 88.

73 Da Costa, xv-xvi.


75 Testimony of Mrs. Mark Marks for Mrs. Nathaniel Russell, July 15, 1822, DTT. Consent was given for Mrs. Marks to testify on behalf of Mrs. Russell.

76 Hamilton, 24; Kennedy and Parker, 25.


78 Testimony of Mrs. Mark Marks for Mrs. Nathaniel Russell, July 15, 1822, DTT.


80 Isaac, 347.

81 In the 1822 Directory, the Russell house was recorded at 48 Meeting Street - now 51 Meeting Street. Nathaniel Russell (1738-1820) first purchased the property in 1775.


Upton, "White and Black Landscapes in Eighteenth Century Virginia," 365.

White masters did enter the slave quarters to sexually exploit black women. See Jones, 7, 19, 157; Morgan, "Black Life in Eighteenth-Century Charleston), 210-213.

Wade, 59 & 61.


Herman, "Embedded Landscaped of the Charleston Single House," 45.

Mary Beach to Elizabeth Gilchrist, July 5, 1822, Mary Lamboll Thomas Beach Papers, SCHS; John Potter to Langdon Cheves, June 29, 1822, Langdon Cheves Papers, SCHS.


Da Costa, xiv.


Darnton, 3 & 5.


98 Kennedy and Parker, 31.

APPENDIX A: FIGURES
Figure 1. Map, South Carolina, from Bradstreet’s Pocket Atlas of the United States published exclusively for Macullar, Parker and Company, Boston, MA. (New York: The Bradstreet Company, 1882).
Courtesy, The Winterthur Library: Printed Book and Periodical Collection
THE CONFESSION OF JACK PURCELL.

If it had not been for the caution of that old villain Vesty, I should not now be in my present situation. He employed every stratagem to induce me to join him. He was in the habit of reading to me all the passages in the newspapers that related to insurrections, and apparently every pamphlet he could lay his hands on, had any connection with slavery. He one day brought me a speech which he said he had spoken in Congress by a Mr. King on the subject of slavery; he told me this Mr. King was the black man's friend, that he Mr. King had declared he would continue to speak, write, and publish pamphlets against slavery the longest day he lived, until the Southern States consented to emancipate their slaves, for that slavery was a great disgrace to the country.

CONFessions of JOHN ENSLOW.

Monday Gill led me in it and took me to Vesty's; there was a large meeting; Vesty told the meeting the people was to rise up and fight the white people for their liberty; we always went to Monday's house afterwards; Monday did all the writing; I heard they were trying all round the country to Georgetown, Sumter, and around to Charleston, &c. about to get people; Peter was also there, he was one; Peter owned Poyas' plantation, where he went to meet; Beulah Peters had been at the meetings, and Adam Yates, Matthias Yates, Dean Mitchell, Caesar Smith and George (a Servitore.) At Vesty's they wanted to make a collection to make peace for the country people, but the men had no money; Monday Gill said Purcell was one to get horses and send men into the country; I heard a blacksmith was to make pipes. Jack McNiel is engaged; he have seen them all at Monday's; Jack said he was one and would try to get more; the plan was to take the Arsenal and Guard House for arms, and not to give the town unless they failed; Monday was writing a letter to St. Domingo, to go by a vessel lying at Gibb's and Harper's wharf; the letter was about the distress of the blacks, and to know if the people of St. Domingo would help them if they made an effort to free themselves; he was writing this letter in March, I am not certain of the time; Poyas was present when Monday wrote the letters, and also a painter, named Prince Rights; I have seen Poyas Haig at Monday's, but he neither assisted or dissented; Jerry Cohen was at Vesty's, and said to me he was one; I heard from Vesty and Monday that they had joined men from the country; Peter Poyas said he had sent into the country to his brother to engage men, who would send him an answer; a party was to attack the Guard House and Arsenal; another to attack the Neck; another the Naval Store on May's wharf; another to attack the Magazine; another to meet at Lightwood's Alley and then try to cut off the companies going to meet at their places of rendezvous; I belong to the African Congregation; on Saturday the 15th June, a man was to be sent into the country to bring down the people, and Reels was to command the country people from Ashley River at the Bridge; Ned Bennet and John Harry to meet at Mr. Harry's corner, and Reels to come down with Vesty's party.

Figure 2. Confessions of Jack Purcell and John Enslow, from James Hamilton, An Account of the Late Intended Insurrection among a portion of the Blacks of this City, (Charleston: A.E. Miller, 1822).

Both men were found guilty. Jack Purcell was hanged on July 26, 1822. John Enslow was sentenced to transportation beyond the limits of the United States, but died while confined in the workhouse in late 1822.
Figure 3. Map, Charleston 1704, engraving by James Akin
Courtesy, The Winterthur Library: Printed Book and
Periodical Collection. Original at New York Public Library

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Figure 4. "A Plan of Charleston, Charleston Neck," 1842, engraved by J. B. Nixon
Courtesy, Charleston County Library, South Carolina Room
These are possible routes the slaves may have taken to arrive at Denmark Vesey’s 20 Bull Street home. Wards 1, 2, 3, 4 - Line down Meeting Street from East Bay to Boundary; Line across Queen Street from the Cooper to Ashley Rivers.
The 1822 directory records the address as 20 Bull Street. Now numbered 56 Bull Street, the one-story structure is listed as a National Historic Landmark.

**Figure 5.** Denmark Vesey's home, Photo by author
Figure 7. "A Plan of Charleston, Charleston Neck," 1842, engraved by J. B. Nixon
Courtesy, Charleston County Library, South Carolina Room
Lines down Meeting Street, site of Monday Gell's shop; Lines down Church Street, site of John Gell's stables;
Nathaniel Russell house marked.
Figure 8. Sadler, from The Youth's Picture Book of Trades, (Cooperstown, NY: H. E. Phinney, 1842).
Courtesy, The Winterthur Library: Printed Book and Periodical Collection

The print offers an approximate view of the appearance of a harness shop.
Figure 9. The Bottle Man, by Elizabeth O'Neill Vernes
Courtesy, The Charleston Museum
Figure 10. Urban Market Scene
Courtesy, The Charleston Museum
The 1822 directory records the address as 48 Meeting Street. Now listed as 51 Meeting Street, the house is owned by Historic Charleston Foundation.
Figure 12. Russell House, Wrought Iron Balcony,
Photo by author
Figure 13. Floor Plan, Russell House

Courtesy, Historic Charleston Foundation (copy)
Original in possession of the Sisters of Charity
Iron spikes above the carriage door at the Miles Brewton House, 27 King Street.
APPENDIX B

TABLE 1

Population Figures for Charleston

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Free Negro</th>
<th>Slave</th>
<th>Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1790</td>
<td>8,089</td>
<td>586</td>
<td>7,684</td>
<td>16,359</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1800</td>
<td>9,630</td>
<td>1,024</td>
<td>9,819</td>
<td>20,473</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1810</td>
<td>11,568</td>
<td>1,472</td>
<td>11,671</td>
<td>24,711</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1820</td>
<td>10,653</td>
<td>1,475</td>
<td>12,652</td>
<td>24,780</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1830</td>
<td>12,828</td>
<td>2,107</td>
<td>15,364</td>
<td>30,289</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1840</td>
<td>13,030</td>
<td>1,558</td>
<td>14,673</td>
<td>29,261</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1850*</td>
<td>20,012</td>
<td>3,441</td>
<td>19,532</td>
<td>42,985</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1860</td>
<td>23,376</td>
<td>3,237</td>
<td>13,909</td>
<td>40,522</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The boundaries of the city were extended in 1848 to include the population on Charleston Neck, north of Boundary Street, now Calhoun Street.

Source: Census of the U.S. Government
APPENDIX C

TABLE 2

THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE CITY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wards</th>
<th>No. of brick houses</th>
<th>No. of wood houses</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Erected since 1850</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>498</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>644</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>251</td>
<td>377</td>
<td>628</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>620</td>
<td>751</td>
<td>1,371</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>606</td>
<td>515</td>
<td>1,121</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>1,975</td>
<td>1,789</td>
<td>3,724</td>
<td>245</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Original Source: City Census 1861
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South Carolina Historical Society
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