



NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE

Humanities

DIVISION OF RESEARCH PROGRAMS

Narrative Section of a Successful Application

The attached document contains the grant narrative of a previously funded grant application, which conforms to a past set of grant guidelines. It is not intended to serve as a model, but to give you a sense of how a successful application may be crafted. Every successful application is different, and each applicant is urged to prepare a proposal that reflects its unique project and aspirations. Prospective applicants should consult the application guidelines for instructions. Applicants are also strongly encouraged to consult with the NEH Division of Research Programs staff well before a grant deadline.

Note: The attachment only contains the grant narrative, not the entire funded application. In addition, certain portions may have been redacted to protect the privacy interests of an individual and/or to protect confidential commercial and financial information and/or to protect copyrighted materials.

Project Title: The Long Road to Freedom: Biddy Mason and the Making of
 Black Los Angeles

Institution: University of Pennsylvania

Project Director: Sarah Barringer Gordon

Grant Program: Collaborative Research

Statement of significance and impact

Within the space of a few years, Bidy Mason went from property to property-holder. Born into slavery in the Georgia cotton belt, Mason was forcibly transported to Mississippi, then to Mormon Utah, and finally to Southern California by the early 1850s. Although California was technically a free state by that time, her master kept Mason and thirteen others in bondage until 1856, when they finally won their freedom in a fiercely contested court ruling. As a freedwoman, Mason earned a reputation as a skilled midwife and a shrewd businesswoman, overcoming tremendous racial and gender discrimination in the process. She accumulated substantial amounts of real estate, and founded schools, charitable institutions, and the city's first African American church, FAME, a pillar of the community to this day.

Despite the dramatic sweep of her life and the lasting significance of her accomplishments, Mason's story has been largely lost to history. No scholarly book-length treatment of her life exists, and no writer has connected her struggles to wider developments in Western American history. And while historians have extensively chronicled twentieth-century black Los Angeles, its nineteenth-century origins remain poorly understood. We therefore seek funding from an NEH Collaborative Grant to resurrect Mason's story and explore its broader meaning for the history of slavery, religion, law, gender, entrepreneurship, and race.

Though partly biographical in focus, our project is not, in itself, a biography. Rather, we use Mason's experiences as a window onto nineteenth-century racial politics to chart the geographies of slavery and freedom in the American West. This is a particularly timely and important history, given the ongoing controversies over Confederate statuary and the legacies of slavery in the United States. The focus of that debate, however, has been confined almost exclusively to the American South. Yet, as our research reveals, slavery extended far beyond the cotton fields of the Mississippi Valley, and shaped the development of the Far West in the mid-nineteenth century. *The Long Road to Freedom* exposes the continental scope of the American slave regime, as masters like Mason's adapted the institution to frontier settings in Utah and California.

Our project, however, is as much about freedom as it is about slavery. It illustrates how individuals seized opportunities to dismantle the system of chattel bondage and to challenge the tenacious hold of white supremacy in the post-Civil War West. Race leaders like Mason used the law to claim rights to property and personhood, and they turned to religion to knit together the black community of Los Angeles. Although residential segregation and legal discrimination would continue and even intensify in the coming decades, Mason helped secure a degree of prosperity unimaginable for a previous generation of African Americans. Mason, therefore, offers an alternate perspective on the history of emancipation, a body of scholarship which has focused largely on the shortcomings of Reconstruction in the American South. As our research illustrates, the experiences of the nation's former slaves were even more varied and geographically dispersed than previous scholars have recognized. Mason's road was indeed long, but it ultimately led to a meaningful freedom.

The project will result in the first scholarly treatment of Mason's pioneering career and the community she helped build. A book-length study and a robust website, complete with digitized documents and interactive maps of nineteenth-century Los Angeles, will tell the story. For scholars and generalist audiences alike, these publications will reveal a new, continental history of slavery and freedom, as well as the little-known African American origins of one of the nation's most important cities.

Project Narrative

Substance and context

The life of Biddy Mason brings together three central narratives of American history: the growth of the slave regime, the conquest and settlement of the North American continent, and the meaning of emancipation. Scholars generally study these narratives in isolation, quarantining the first to the field of Southern history, the second to Western history, and the third to studies of Reconstruction. Our research crosses these traditional boundaries, arguing that the struggle over slavery and emancipation unfolded on a continental scale. Mason herself endured enslavement across North America – from Georgia, to Mississippi, to Utah, to California. But she eventually won her freedom, and then helped expand the meaning of liberty for her fellow African Americans in Los Angeles until her death in 1891. Retracing Mason’s long road to freedom, our project presents a new perspective on the history of race, gender, law, religion, and entrepreneurship in the American West. This multi-faceted history will be told through two major publications – a book-length study and an interactive website – to be described in greater detail in subsequent sections.

The project falls neatly in two halves, covering Mason’s nearly four decades of enslavement, followed by her remarkable thirty-five years as a free woman. The first section tracks Biddy (who did not take on the last name of Mason until winning her freedom) from her birth in 1818 in Georgia’s cotton belt, to Mississippi, and to her years of coerced labor within the frontier societies of the Salt Lake Basin and Southern California. Biddy arrived in Utah in 1848, alongside some of the first American pioneers into the region. Although most of these pioneers went willingly, dozens, including Biddy, were forcibly transported as slaves. Her master, Robert M. Smith of Mississippi, had converted to Mormonism several years earlier, and joined a number of fellow slaveholders in the western exodus. Because Utah had passed no legislation restricting slavery – and in fact, Mormon leaders adopted a slave code for the territory by 1852 – Biddy and others remained legally defined as chattel. They stayed in Utah until 1851, when Smith brought

Biddy and the rest of his enslaved “family” to the newly-founded Mormon colony of San Bernardino in Southern California. Although California had outlawed slavery in its constitution of 1850, the state’s political and judicial leaders turned a blind eye to the continued importation of enslaved people. Biddy and the thirteen other African American women and children under Smith’s control – made up primarily of Biddy’s kin and children – would have to wait until their landmark case in 1856 to win their freedom.

This part of the project joins a small but growing body of literature on slavery in the trans-Mississippi West. Stacey Smith, James F. Brooks, Andrés R sendez, Michael Magliari, and two of the authors on this project, among several others, have explored how slavery functioned in nineteenth-century Utah, New Mexico, and California. The focus of much of this recent work has been on indigenous slaves, taken as captives during the interminable warfare of the Southwestern borderlands. Much less, however, has been written on the experiences of African American coerced laborers in the region, and how systems of black chattel slavery and Native American captivity either overlapped or diverged. Biddy’s forced transportation across the country opens a rare glimpse of the changing face of slavery as the regime moved west, and enables us to directly compare the labor order of the slave South to systems of coercion in Utah and California.

The composition of Smith’s enslaved household offers a hint as to how unfreedom persisted – and how it was gendered – in the Far West. Very few masters in the slave South would have maintained a workforce of exclusively women and children, as Smith did. Instead, most southern masters preferred young men to conduct the heavy field labor required on cotton, sugar, and rice plantations. Within the arid and semi-arid West, however, there was little large-scale plantation agriculture, and women and children were often considered preferable for the domestic tasks upon which frontier households depended. As our research shows, there were no natural limits to slavery, contrary to the arguments of a previous generation of scholars. Indeed, American slavery proved remarkably adaptive and flexible as it spanned the continent.

Our project makes a close study of legal history, especially as it relates to slavery and race in the American West. As we demonstrate, antebellum California was a free state in name only. Bidy and hundreds of other enslaved African Americans were transported there after the gold rush, and for years thereafter, masters exploited the state's laws to maintain their property in humans. Yet Bidy appealed successfully to the law in her 1856 suit for freedom, which generated national attention just one year before an enslaved man by the name of Dred Scott unsuccessfully pressed his own case in the U.S. Supreme Court. Mason is a rare success story in a decade that saw slavery expand across the continent, cotton prices soar, and the rights of southern masters reinforced at the highest levels of power.

Our understanding of the legal history of slavery is incomplete without attention to Bidy's experiences in the Far West. The law of slavery and freedom was hard-fought in California, where in the late 1850s, voters attempted to split the state in two. Slavery was to be the dividing line. San Bernardino and Los Angeles would have become part of a slaveholding jurisdiction, had the proposed division taken place. Although the measure failed, the law of slavery infected the political economy of Southern California, shaping policies, tax structures, and institutions, in ways both subtle and obvious. Piecing together Mason's efforts to navigate a hostile environment illuminates the limits of law as well as its power.

The second half of our project is rooted in Los Angeles, where Mason, finally free, built a career as a midwife and eventually as a real estate entrepreneur. We explore how Mason's enterprises broke down gender and racial barriers, transformed the geography of Los Angeles, and gave rise to an independent black business and cultural class. When Bidy first arrived in the area in 1851, Los Angeles was a rough and sparsely settled town of 1,600 residents, most all of them either Anglo-American or Mexican-born. But by the time of her death, it had ballooned to a city of 50,000, including a robust African American community of roughly 1,200.

During those early years, however, opportunities for African Americans, especially African American women, did not come easily; they had to be created, sometimes in surprising

ways. Mason forged her own opportunity with a seemingly unorthodox move: she partnered with a former slaveholder, Dr. John S. Griffin, to begin a practice in midwifery and nursing, one of the very few professional paths available to a woman like Mason. Success in one enterprise led her into another, and she eventually amassed substantial real estate holdings and a personal fortune of roughly \$300,000 (nearly \$8.5 million in today's dollars), an unprecedented sum for a black woman in the United States. She used that wealth to advance a number of philanthropic projects and to support the emerging black community of Los Angeles. Her legacy lives on most visibly in the First African Methodist Episcopal Church (FAME), co-founded and financially supported by Mason, which knit together the community and expressed its faith. Like black communities across the country in the post-emancipation era, it was largely through religious institutions that L.A.'s African Americans articulated their politics and built cultural and social structures that protected their families and businesses. Our project explores how the city's black community emerged and evolved in the late nineteenth century, thanks to Mason's pioneering business and philanthropic ventures.

Once complete, our project will represent a major new addition to the literature on African American history in the West. Quintard Taylor's seminal work on the black experience in the West, *In Search of the Racial Frontier* (1999) has been followed by a number of important studies, yet early Los Angeles remains largely absent from this body of literature.

Understandably, much of that work centers on the twentieth century, when California's black population grew considerably. What little there is on California's nineteenth-century African American history is rooted in San Francisco, where most of the political leadership resided. A relative lack of source material partly explains the absence of early Los Angeles from the broader scholarship on African American history. For instance, there is only one biography on Bidley Mason – a slim and idiosyncratic work that blends the author's personal memoir and anecdotes from her research experiences into Bidley's suit for freedom. While drawing much-needed attention to Mason and her emancipation in 1856 – for which more records exist – the biography

reveals relatively little about the law of slavery and freedom, or the pioneering post-emancipation career and the networks that Mason helped build.

To correct this historiographic blind spot, we will survey a much broader source base and critically assess the records produced by Mason's contemporaries, both black and white. In our preliminary research we have already uncovered revealing and otherwise overlooked materials related to Mason and her post-Civil War career. These include tax documents and court records, which will help us piece together the full extent of her business and philanthropic ventures.

Although Mason left no written records herself – as she was likely illiterate – there is an important body of correspondence between other community leaders, which throws new light on the early African American experience within Los Angeles. The newspapers of mid-nineteenth-century L.A., including the *Los Angeles Star*, the *Los Angeles News*, and the Spanish language *El Clamor Publico*, are also illuminating. For the pre-Civil War period, we will rely on memoirs and correspondence from a broad range of historical actors, including Utah's Mormon elite, the California judge who ruled in Mason's favor in the 1856, and records from the slaveholding Smith family. To be sure, recovering the history of a figure who left no written records of her own presents challenges. But the rewards will be substantial. Through the life of Bidley Mason, we will reconstruct a continental history of slavery and freedom, while simultaneously producing the most complete study to date on the origins of black Los Angeles.

History of the project and its productivity

Our collaborative venture emerged organically over the course of several years from the shared research interests of Professors Gordon, Foster, and Waite. Bidley Mason – particularly her 1856 suit for freedom and her pioneering role in California's black religious life – makes cameo appearances in the forthcoming books of both Gordon and Waite. Both scholars quickly recognized, however, that Mason was far too important to the broader history of slavery, emancipation, law and religion to be confined to a supporting role in their monographs.

Furthermore, other scholars' lack of attention to Mason, they recognized, had contributed to a major lacuna in the literature on race in the American West. Thus, while on research fellowships at the Huntington Library in the winter of 2016, Gordon and Waite began combining their substantial materials on Mason and digging deeper into the history of nineteenth-century black Los Angeles. They made several major new archival discoveries over the following two years, thanks primarily to Gordon's deep knowledge of California tax and probate court records. From this research, they began drafting a major new work, beginning in spring 2016, on the life of Bidy Mason and the community she helped build.

That research led them to Professor Foster, the preeminent authority on L.A.'s early black churches. Over a long and productive career, Foster has collected a tremendous base of material on the subject. He thus took on a role as de facto research director of the project, guiding the team to new sources related to late nineteenth-century Los Angeles and identifying possible dead ends. Through their years of research experience, Foster and Gordon had independently built relationships with several leading figures at FAME, including Pastor J. Edgar Boyd, his deeply knowledgeable assistant Linda Smith, and the church's archivist Barbara Holmes. They agreed to further aid the project by providing access to the church's archival holdings and consulting on other sources related to the city's African American history. The project is also designed to be of use to FAME and its members. The authors are committed to serving historic churches and other surviving landmarks of early black Los Angeles, while also maintaining scholarly autonomy from the church itself.

The three leading members of the team – Gordon, Waite, and Foster – have published numerous articles on related themes in the history of race and religion. While none of these works deal extensively with Bidy Mason, that research has introduced them to research methods, source materials, and archivists for this collaborative project. Gordon's 2015 *William and Mary Quarterly* article ("The African Supplement: Religion, Race, and Corporate Law in Early National America") on the origins of black Methodism in the U.S. showcases the

importance of legal studies to African American religious history – a methodology that guides the Bidy Mason project. For years, Foster has published extensively on black religious institutions in Los Angeles. In the process, he has built close working relationships with curators and librarians for this project’s most important archives, including the Huntington Library, UCLA, USC, and FAME. Finally, Waite’s forthcoming book provides context and insight into the role of slavery and its aftermath in the American West, from which this project will build.

Alongside Sudeshna Dutta, a technical expert at the University of Pennsylvania, Waite and Gordon have begun preliminary work on the project’s website. They have secured a domain name (<http://biddymproject.wpengine.com>), which Penn has committed to hosting indefinitely, beyond the three-year project timeframe. The website, which currently includes some digitized documents and background material on the team’s research, serves as a prototype for the much more robust digital venture planned for the project. We will continue digitizing relevant documents as we progress with our research. The most technically sophisticated elements of the website, however, are dependent on project funding and the hiring of another expert in digital methods, and thus the website remains a fairly rudimentary model at this stage.

The team has also made progress toward the completion of the other major component of the project, the proposed book. We estimate that roughly a quarter of the total research for the book has already been completed. Although only fragments of chapters have been drafted at this point, we have prepared a book proposal and an extensive outline, which identifies the project’s major research questions. This was recently submitted to Cambridge University Press, whose senior acquisitions editor in American history, Deborah Gershenowitz, has expressed strong interest. Chuch Grench, the senior editor and assistant director of University of North Carolina Press, has also expressed a deep interest in the project (for letters of interest from both presses, see appendix). Once we have drafted at least part of the manuscript, the team will approach several other publishers, with the help of our literary agent, Geri Thoma.

Despite the ambitious, multi-platform nature of the project, we will move quickly toward completion within the three-year grant period, thanks to our combined expertise and significant research progress to date. By the end of year three, the website will go live and we will submit the full manuscript to a publisher. That will leave only the task of correcting the publisher's proofs to continue beyond the grant period. Unlike the rest of the project, however, those corrections will not entail a major collaborative effort, and thus will be achievable even while balancing our teaching duties. In accordance with standard publication timetables, we expect the book to be available roughly a year-and-a-half after the end of the project. By that point, Waite and Gordon will give a series of public talks to promote the project, building from their scheduled centennial address at the Huntington Library in 2020.

Collaborators

Our project draws its strength from the team's reservoir of collective knowledge and diverse methodological approaches. Research into this particular topic – Biddy Mason and the black community of late nineteenth-century Los Angeles – began in earnest in the winter of 2016. But for years before that, team members had been pursuing related research themes, including the history of slavery and emancipation in the American West, the church history of early Los Angeles, and the intersection of law and religion in California and Utah. As a result, we have great familiarity with numerous relevant archives across the region – the Huntington Library, USC, UCLA, and FAME being the four most important – and strong working relationships with archival staff, some of whom have generously agreed to aid in this project. We will be able, therefore, to move swiftly and efficiently toward the completion of this ambitious project within the fellowship period.

Sarah Barringer Gordon, project co-director, is the Arlin M. Adams Professor of Constitutional Law and Professor of History at the University of Pennsylvania. She is the author of the prize-winning *The Mormon Question: Polygamy and Constitutional Conflict in Nineteenth-Century America* (University of North Carolina, 2002) and *The Spirit of the Law: Religious*

Voices and the Constitution in Modern America (Harvard, 2010). Gordon is also the recipient of numerous fellowships and honors, including a Guggenheim Fellowship and the Maguire Chair in Ethics and American History at the Library of Congress. She currently serves as the President of the American Society for Legal History, and since 2012, as a Distinguished Lecturer for the Organization of American Historians. Over the next three years, Gordon will continue her research on Bidley Mason, especially as it relates to the legal and religious history of Los Angeles. Alongside Kevin Waite, she will also co-author the project's monograph.

Kevin Waite, project co-director, is an Assistant Professor of American History at Durham University (U.K.). His first book, *The Continental South: Slavery, Empire, and the Civil War in the American West*, will be published by the University of North Carolina Press in 2020. For the next three years, he will devote all his research time to the project, co-authoring the monograph and overseeing the development of the website. As a regular contributor to major media outlets – including the *Huffington Post*, the *Los Angeles Times*, and the *Washington Post*, among others – Waite will also bring the team's research to the wider public. To that end, he is preparing several articles on Bidley Mason and L.A.'s early black history for the *Los Angeles Times*. At a moment when the history of race, slavery, and white supremacy is generating major media coverage, his work gives California and the West a central place in a timely national dialogue.

Lorn Foster, project associate director, is the Charles and Henrietta Johnson Detoy Professor of American Government and Professor of Politics at Pomona College. He is a leading authority on the ecclesiastical history of black Los Angeles, with publications in the *Western Historical Quarterly*, *American Politics Quarterly*, *Southern Studies*, and *Western Politics Quarterly*, among many others. With his deep knowledge of L.A.'s early black history and relevant local archives, Foster will oversee the project's research. He will also use some of the project's funds to hire a small team of undergraduate researchers from Pomona College, who will assist in the collection and digitization of documents for the website.

The project will also draw on the expertise of two senior scholars of Mormon history, **Quincy Newell**, Associate Professor of Religious Studies at Hamilton College, and **W. Paul Reeve**, Simmons Professor of Mormon Studies at the University of Utah. Both scholars have particular expertise on the African American experience within Latter-day Saints history. Newell's current book project explores the overlooked histories of non-white Mormons – both African American and Native American. Reeve's most recent book, *Religion of a Different Color: Race and the Mormon Struggle for Whiteness (Oxford 2015)*, won several major prizes, including the Mormon History Association's Best Book Award. He is currently building a digital database to identify all known black Mormons between 1830 and 1930. Although they will not be funded directly by the NEH, both scholars have generously agreed to aid the project by locating sources on the history of slavery and race in the LDS church. Reeve's database of black Mormons will be of particular value to the team, as we attempt reconstruct the African American communities that Bidy inhabited while enslaved in Utah and San Bernardino. Newell and Reeve will also read draft material on the several chapters that cover Bidy Mason and Robert Smith's experiences within the LDS community.

The project's co-directors and associate director will work closely with three leaders from FAME: Senior Minister **J. Edgar Boyd**, his administrative assistant **Linda Smith**, and the church's archivist **Barbara Holmes**. Together, they will collect additional documents on African American religious life in Los Angeles, especially as it relates to Bidy Mason and the origins of FAME itself. The project directors will also assist FAME's recently inaugurated archival effort, working with Holmes to develop its holdings and interpretation of the church's history.

The project website will rely on several experts in digital methods. **Sudeshna Dutta**, at the University of Pennsylvania, built the preliminary project website which now houses some of the documents related to Mason's life. She will continue to oversee the digitization efforts, but, given the sheer scope of the project, will be assisted by several others. **Hannah Jung**, a PhD student at Brandies University with expertise in geo-spatial mapping, will join Dutta as a

specialist in digital methods. Jung will also draw on the research findings of the project to publish an article on the history of African American midwifery in the West. With NEH funding, we will also be able to hire a part-time technical specialist for a year, who will spearhead the task of digitally mapping L.A.'s nineteenth-century black community. All of this digital work will be overseen by Gordon and Waite, who will write the text for the website and ensure that all digitized documents are properly contextualized and indexed.

In short, the team stands ready, given our wide-ranging expertise and substantial research to date, to reconstruct this crucial yet overlooked chapter in American history. An NEH Collaborative Grant would provide us with the time and resources necessary to complete our research, draft the monograph, and hire additional personnel to build the project website.

Methods and execution

Our project brings together scholars working across several interlinked disciplines – religious studies, politics, law, and history. This pluralistic approach is essential when studying the life of Biddy Mason and the community she built. Mason wielded the law to win her freedom and to protect her rights in a hostile political environment, and she turned to religion to foster her philanthropic activities and to draw together the African American community of early Los Angeles. Collectively, our scholarly expertise – professional legal training, fluency in digital methods, deep knowledge of the city's early religious institutions and political life, and years of research into the history of slavery and emancipation in the American West – will enable us to reconstruct, in greater detail than ever before, Mason's freedom struggle and the origins of black Los Angeles.

Our multi-platform study is driven by a set of core questions. First, how did slavery evolve and persist as it moved across the continent during the antebellum period, even among persecuted groups such as the Latter-day Saints? Second, how did the law either impede or enable the emancipation of enslaved people in the West, and how did emancipation vary in Los

Angeles from the experiences of those in the South? Third, how did Los Angeles's early African American community take shape, and how did religious and business institutions facilitate its development and political orientation? Fourth, how did migration, forced and otherwise, affect family life and the household economies of black Californians? And fifth, where precisely was this community and its many members located within Los Angeles? This final question may seem pedestrian. But a greater understanding of the city's early geography is central to the aims of the broader project.

To answer these questions, the project will utilize a combination of traditional print publications – namely the book-length study of Mason and her times – and cutting-edge digital methods in order to recreate the early black community of Los Angeles. In tandem, these two publications will reveal the ways in which slavery, emancipation, and race shaped the history and geography of the American West.

The first question – how the slave regime adapted to the West – builds on this team's extensive research into the history of labor in the region. Gordon's 2017 article on the Mountain Meadows Massacre, an infamous slaughter of an emigrant party by a Mormon militia in 1857, explores the religious and political ideology that sustained coerced labor in antebellum Utah, while Waite's forthcoming book details how American southerners built a transcontinental political network in the service of slavery. Even after years of research, however, we have only begun to scratch the surface of this history. Biddy Mason's story enables us to delve deeper into the nature of African American slave labor in the West than any previous historian has. More specifically, her narrative makes possible the first comparative study between the unfree labor regimes of Southern plantation districts and the arid and semi-arid regions of the West. The nature of Biddy's labor altered dramatically as her master transported her from the cotton belt of Mississippi, where she was forced into heavy field labor, to the farming communities of the Salt Lake Basin and Southern California, where she oversaw the domestic tasks of thirteen other enslaved women and children. We will also seek to understand her reproductive labor – and the

sexual exploitation on which it was based – as Smith was rumored to have fathered some of Biddy’s children.

The study also explores the changing face of slave control. Until Biddy beat him in a California court of law in 1856, Robert M. Smith was one of the largest and most successful slaveholders of the Far West. (It may well be that our research confirms that Smith was, in fact, the single largest slaveholder in the state.) To move tremendously valuable human property from the tightly patrolled plantation districts of the South into the open frontier of the American West was a serious financial gamble and logistical challenge for masters like Smith. Our study asks how he adapted – and forced his enslaved workers to adapt – to varied legal and labor landscapes. We thus highlight the flexibility and persistence of slavery as an institution that could thrive on both large-scale plantations and within individual households. Although several recent studies have brought attention to slavery’s adaptability, none have been able to study the subject in a systematic, comparative manner. Ours, therefore, will be a valuable addition to the scholarship on American slavery and the multiple forms it took.

The study of law is central to our second major question, which focuses on how western slaves won their liberty and negotiated their freedom. Pioneering studies by Rudolph Lapp and Stacey Smith make use of nineteenth-century labor law to explore early California’s black history. Neither historian, however, has formal legal training like Professor Gordon. And neither historian has studied, in any detail, the broader implications for Biddy Mason’s landmark 1856 suit for freedom, which resulted in the emancipation of fourteen enslaved women and children. To understand how this ruling attracted national attention, and how it shaped jurisprudence in California, is one of the central objectives of our study. Given Mason’s nearly forty-year career in Los Angeles after her emancipation, our study will also trace the evolution of labor and property law across a formative period – perhaps *the* formative period – in California’s black history. We ask how African-Americans experienced emancipation – and how they used the law to advance their political rights, including their hard-won right to testify against whites; but also,

conversely, how Anglo elites continuously marshalled the law to circumscribe those rights and preserve racial hierarchy in Los Angeles. This is a history of legal struggle that brings us from the antebellum period to the birth of the Jim Crow era at Mason's death in 1891.

Our third question – regarding the development of black religious, political, and entrepreneurial life in Los Angeles – requires close study of the city's early churches and related philanthropic organizations, as well as various business enterprises. The study will examine the ways that black businesses, like Mason's, took root and even flourished in a hostile political environment that was controlled by a relatively narrow Anglo and Hispanic elite. By examining correspondence, as well as tax and court records of nineteenth-century Los Angeles, we will reconstruct the financial and social networks of the city's first black entrepreneurs. We will also explore how First African Methodist Episcopal Church (FAME), which was constructed on property donated by Mason, became the epicenter of black life in Los Angeles. A series of important local studies have examined how L.A.'s early black churches developed in the late nineteenth century. Yet these church histories have not yet received the attention they deserve from scholars outside California and beyond the field of religious studies. Our project builds on this body of scholarship, as well as yet untapped archival holdings of the city's black churches, to bring the story of FAME and other early African American institutions into a fully national narrative of slavery, emancipation, and black political life.

Our fourth question draws on similar sources – correspondence, census data, and tax records – to examine domestic relations within early black LA. This was essentially an immigrant community. Thus, we will explore the experiences of migration and seek to understand how physical mobility was eventually accompanied by economic mobility. We surmise that a focus on domestic relations and family life will help explain the success of this early African American community, particularly the successes of powerful matriarchs like Mason. Business partnerships, like Mason's very own, were cemented through marriage and kinship ties. By rooting part of our study in the black home, and the business ventures that

emerged from it, we hope to reveal a history of emancipation that moves far beyond the failures of Reconstruction in the South. Freedom brought varied experiences for African Americans and their families, a fact that becomes particularly clear when the historical perspective is shifted westward to previously overlooked communities.

Our fifth question concerns the geography of L.A.'s early black community, requiring the use of cutting-edge digital methods to build a user-friendly project website. That site will feature a catalogue of digitized documents, alongside interactive digital maps of nineteenth-century Los Angeles, enabling us to reconstruct L.A.'s emerging black community in greater detail than any previous work of scholarship. Drawing on census data, tax records, newspaper reports, court and legal records, and contemporary correspondence, we will map the location of black residences, churches, and businesses in nineteenth-century Los Angeles. Biographical detail and digitized primary source documents will be linked to the relevant parts of the website's map, thus making available a new trove of material to students and researchers. To help orient themselves, users will be able to overlay this spatial data onto a map of contemporary L.A. The site will also plot out a walking tour of early black Los Angeles, flagging important landmarks and contextualizing them with further information on the major figures and events in the city's history. As such, the website will appeal to scholars, students, tourists, and even longtime residents of the city. And along with our scholarly publications, this digital component will reinforce a central argument of the project: Although geographically distant from the cotton belt, California was fundamentally shaped by slavery and racism, especially by those who fought against racial inequality.

The website will adhere strictly to a number of technical standards. Users will be able to georeference the site's maps by overlaying them onto maps of contemporary Los Angeles, made possible through the ESRI's ArcGIS software, with the final shapefiles exported and saved in the OpenGIS Geography Markup Language (GML) format to ensure interoperability. Descriptive metadata will be generated for each GIS file in accordance with ISO 19115-1:2014. The interactive mapping application will be developed as a browser-based JavaScript application

using the open-source LeafletJS library. Project information will be stored in a database implemented in SQL for ease of integration with the client-side web application. All website design will conform to the W3C standards for web design and applications. In order to manage and make freely available the project's trove of digitized documents, we will follow the Text Encoding Initiative's (TEI) P5 guidelines. To facilitate indexing, images of text documents will be processed through standard Optical Character Recognition (OCR) software, such as Abbyy FineReader, Tesseract, or OmniPage. Digitized photographs will be stored according to the Federal Agencies Digitization Guidelines Initiative (FADGI) with the master images stored in uncompressed, lossless TIFF images which will be used to generate the compressed, website-accessible images stored in JPEG or JPEG2000 formats. Most of this work will be completed by the three digital experts – Sudeshna Dutta, Hannah Jung, and the expert in digital methods to be hired in year 2 – with Gordon and Waite providing oversight and general direction for the website.

While the central aim of the project and the majority of the funding will be directed toward the book and the website, our collaboration will also advance several related projects of the team's members. As noted above, Hannah Jung will continue to conduct research on the history of African American midwifery in the mid-nineteenth century. Her research will provide insights into Mason's professional nursing career after her emancipation, and will also result in the publication of a single-authored article on the subject – thus burnishing Jung's academic credentials at a crucial early stage in her career. Paul Reeve's digital database of African American Mormons will help the team locate other enslaved people within the Salt Lake Basin and San Bernardino, communities that Bidy herself inhabited during the late 1840s and early 1850s. In turn, the team's research into Bidy's experiences in these communities will hopefully uncover additional African Americans for Reeve's database. Finally, Foster's research expertise will guide the team to useful sources on the religious history of Los Angeles, while the team's research on Mason's business and philanthropic ventures will also provide Foster with crucial

material for a series of articles he plans to publish on the city's early black churches. Waite and Gordon also plan to co-author one or two op-eds for the *Los Angeles Times*, connecting the city's nineteenth-century history to present-day issues in the African American community there. Together these pieces, emerging from the research agendas of team members, will help draw attention to the overlooked early black history of Southern California. Furthermore, these corollary research aims will each serve the project's main objective – the publication of a book-length study of Biddy Mason and her times.

The book will be co-authored by Gordon and Waite, with Foster continuing to provide research support and general oversight. Given his expertise on the history of slavery, Waite will be the primary researcher for the first four chapters, detailing Mason's early life and labors in Georgia, Mississippi, Utah, and Southern California. As a legal scholar, Gordon will continue researching the chapters on Mason's suit for freedom and the broader legal ramifications of the case. Both scholars will contribute to the final chapters on Mason's rise to fortune and the building of L.A.'s black community and religious life, where Foster's guidance will be of particular value. During the writing process, Gordon and Waite will work together closely, jointly drafting each chapter to ensure a uniform authorial voice and continuity in subject matter.

While a substantial amount of research has already been completed, several additional trips to the Huntington Library, UCLA, USC, FAME, and smaller Los Angeles repositories will be required. Because Gordon, Foster, and Waite, all spend part of the year in Los Angeles, no travel funds will be necessary. Research assistance will also be provided by a small group of paid assistants from Pomona College, whose work will benefit from proximity to the necessary archives and from Professor Foster's guidance. Below is a chapter outline of the book's contents.

***THE LONG ROAD TO FREEDOM:
BIDDY MASON AND THE MAKING OF BLACK LOS ANGELES***

Part I: Slavery

Chapter 1: Early Life and Labor in the Cotton Belt (1818-1846)

The book opens in the Georgia cotton belt in 1818 with the birth of Bridget, known more commonly as Bidy, and explores the explosive growth of slave-based agriculture in the region. The chapter also asks why the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints found favor among Robert M. Smith and other slaveholders in the South. It concludes with Smith's conversion, and his plans to embark on the exodus to Utah, along with his slaves.

Chapter 2: Overland (1847)

Chapter 2 follows Smith and Bidy across the continent to the Salt Lake Basin, an arduous overland journey. In the coming years, hundreds of slaves would be forced to make this expedition (most of them bound for California's gold fields). We explore not only the journey and the labor slaves were expected to perform along the way, but also what was waiting for them in Utah. Early LDS leaders gave theological license to slavery and thus ensured that Smith's human property would be protected, well beyond the borders of the slave South.

Chapter 3: Slavery Among the Saints (1847-1851)

Bidy may have escaped the backbreaking labor of the Mississippi cotton fields, but she found her condition little improved in Utah. This chapter draws on the testimony from former slaves in Utah to reconstruct the coercive labor regime of the antebellum Far West, and to question how those slaves' experiences compared with enslaved labor in the American South.

Chapter 4: California Bound (1851-1856)

Bidy discovered, once again, that the path to freedom did not run west – at least not yet. This chapter explores the legal and political culture of California, and the experiences of both slave and free emigrants in San Bernardino. Smith was unable, finally, to prevent Bidy from all

interaction with the broader community around San Bernardino. She met and was befriended by a small group of free blacks – finally, she had the beginnings of a plan.

Chapter 5: The Trial (1856)

After nearly four decades of enslavement and a transcontinental journey, Bidy finally challenged her master in the court of law. This chapter follows the dramatic twists and turns of the trial, including Smith's attempts at witness intimidation and kidnapping to order to secure his human property.

Part II: Freedom

Chapter 6: The Verdict (1856-1859)

Bidy, and thirteen others previously under Smith's control, won their freedom by the end of the trial – a full six years after California had technically outlawed slavery. This chapter explores the legal significance of the ruling through a careful study of the language and reasoning of the opinion. And it raises an important question for the history of law more broadly: How did the Bidy verdict influence legal precedent in the age of Dred Scott?

Chapter 7: Civil War in the City of Angels (1861-1865)

Although California as a whole remained loyal to the Union, the southern part of the state, and Los Angeles in particular, witnessed a strong show of support for the Confederacy. This chapter explores how Mason navigated life in a quasi-Confederate city during the tumultuous war years, even winning over former slaveholders like Dr. John S. Griffin, who soon offered her a place as a nurse and midwife in his medical practice.

Chapter 8: Building a Fortune (1865- c.1880)

How did a black woman, in an age of surging white supremacist rhetoric, overcome both racial and gender discrimination? This chapter explores how Mason did so, first through a successful

nursing practice and then as a real estate investor. This was the fortune that helped lay the foundations for black Los Angeles.

Chapters 9 and 10: Building Black Los Angeles (1872-1891)

The final two chapters explore the development of L.A.’s African American community in the twenty-year period after Mason helped found FAME on a plot she donated. We examine several community leaders, along with Mason, and their political and commercial gains in a city that was still controlled by white elites. The book ends with a curious contrast: the dawning of the Jim Crow regime in Bidley’s former state of Mississippi; and the emergence of a newly empowered black elite within her adopted home of California.

Work plan

All aspects of the project will be overseen by the co-directors, Gordon and Waite, while the associate director, Foster, will manage the team’s research activity in Los Angeles, including a small group of undergraduate assistants. When not otherwise teaching or engaged in departmental administrative work, both Gordon and Waite will dedicate 100 percent of their work time to the project over the next three years. Much of this work will be devoted to drafting the book manuscript, to be completed by the end of year three. Foster will balance responsibilities to the project with his ongoing research on early black churches in L.A. Dutta and Jung, who will lead the digital venture alongside a technical expert to be hired in year two, will also work in a part-time capacity. Finally, Newell and Reeve will also allocate a small portion of their time to the team (roughly five to ten days), serving as advisors on the Mormon dimension of the project.

Timeline	
Year 1, Months 1-6 (July-December 2019)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Host introductory meeting with all research collaborators to outline detailed project plan and define individual roles (Gordon, Waite, Foster, Dutta, Jung, Newell, Reeve, and leaders of FAME) ➤ Continue research at UCLA and the Huntington Library (Gordon)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Finish collecting documents relating to L.A.'s late nineteenth-century church history (Foster) ➤ Continue research into the history of midwifery (Jung) ➤ Advertise positions for research assistantships at Pomona College; interview all applicants; make final offers (Foster)
Year 1, Months 7-12 (January-June 2020)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Finish collecting research material from all California archives (led by Foster, assisted by Gordon, Waite, and undergraduate researchers) ➤ Finish digitizing all relevant documents for the website (led by Dutta, assisted by undergraduate researchers) ➤ Index documents for the website and write short descriptions for each (Gordon and Waite, assisted by Jung) ➤ Complete research into the history of African American midwifery (Jung; this research will also relate directly to her PhD dissertation)
Year 2, Months 1-6 (July-December 2020)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Complete drafts of Chapters 1, 2, and 5 of the monograph (Gordon and Waite, who will be on research leave at this point and therefore able to devote all of their working time to joint writing) ➤ Complete the book proposal and finalize contract with a major publisher (Gordon and Waite, assisted by Geri Thoma, their agent) ➤ Advertise and interview for one-year, part-time position as digital project lead (Gordon and Waite, assisted by Dutta) ➤ Hire digital project lead, with expectation that the candidate will begin the position at the start of year 3 (Gordon and Waite) ➤ Begin drafting an article on the history of midwifery (Jung) ➤ Begin drafting an article on late nineteenth-century black Christianity in L.A. (Foster)
Year 2, Months 7-12 (January-June 2021)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Complete drafts of Chapters 3, 4, and 6 (Gordon and Waite, who will still be on research leave) ➤ Write an article on Bidy Mason and the legacy of racial discrimination in contemporary California for the <i>Los Angeles Times</i> (Gordon and Waite) ➤ Complete and submit an article on the history of midwifery (Jung; this will serve as a trailer piece for her dissertation) ➤ Complete and submit an article on late nineteenth-century black Christianity in L.A. (Foster)
Year 3, Months 1-6 (July-December 2021)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Complete drafts of Chapters 7 and 9 (Gordon and Waite) ➤ Begin mapping project of black Los Angeles (newly-hired digital lead, assisted by Dutta and Jung)
Year 3, Months 7-12 (January-June 2022)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Complete drafts of Chapters 8 and 10 (Gordon and Waite) ➤ Submit completed manuscript to publisher (Gordon and Waite) ➤ Finish map of black L.A. (digital lead, assisted by Dutta and Jung)

Final product and dissemination

We will reconstruct this timely history through both an interactive website and a major book-length study on Biddy Mason and the community she built. Both publications will appeal to slightly different audiences. Taken together, they will enable us to trace the evolution of slavery across the continent and to witness the crucial early struggles for black advancement in Los Angeles. Through our prototype website and our correspondence with Cambridge University Press and University of North Carolina Press, we have laid the groundwork for these two major components of the project.

As noted, the project will also result in the publication of several articles, stemming from the individual research interests of Foster, Jung, Gordon, and Waite. Jung plans to publish on the history of black midwifery in the nineteenth century, drawing on some of the major research findings from this project. Foster, meanwhile, will continue his individual work into the early history of L.A.'s black churches. Gordon and Waite plan to co-author one or two opinion pieces for the *Los Angeles Times*, where Waite has already published on several occasions and has a direct line to the Opinion editor, Juliet Lapidus. Together, these pieces will bring greater attention to an overlooked historical figure and enhance public awareness of our scholarly endeavors, prior to the publication of our book.

The website will introduce scholars and students to this understudied chapter in African American history through three main features. 1) A catalogue of digitized documents and photographs relating to Mason and the early black community of Los Angeles. This set of primary source documents – newspaper reports from her freedom suit, tax records from her business enterprises, correspondence of California's black political and religious leaders – will be made freely available to the public on our website and easily searchable through our index. We have already secured the domain name through the University of Pennsylvania and are in the early stages of building our document database. 2) Interactive digital maps of nineteenth-century Los Angeles. Through our website, users will be able explore a detailed two-dimensional

recreation of the city, with embedded links for further information on crucial locations and prominent people. To orient themselves, they will be able to overlay these maps onto maps of contemporary Los Angeles. 3) This geo-spatial mapping will enable us to provide an annotated walking tour to the history of black Los Angeles. The guide will direct users to key sites and episodes in the development of the city's black community, linking each major stop on the tour to a digitized primary source document and a short essay on its broader significance. Such a guide will be especially valuable for local schools. Through this feature, teachers will be able to lead field trips to explore the deep history of the city and design assignments based on the site's digitized photographs and documents.

The most widely read and referenced product of this project will be the monograph, co-authored by Gordon and Waite. Because of the topic's scholarly significance, but also its likely popular appeal, we will seek to reach a crossover market for the book. Gordon and Waite have productive working relationships with editors at several leading publishing houses, including Cambridge University Press, Oxford University Press and Harvard University Press, which should expedite the initial negotiations and result in an advanced contract. In the process, we will turn to Gordon's literary agent, Geri Thoma of Writer's House Literary Agency, to ensure an appropriately ambitious marketing and publicity campaign for the book. Upon publication, Gordon and Waite will also conduct a series of public addresses to promote the work and bring greater attention to Bidy Mason's remarkable achievements and underappreciated legacy.

We anticipate several costs associated with this project, almost exclusively related to its digital features. Although we have already secured the domain name for the site, which is hosted by Penn, there will be additional costs for the design of the website during the three-year fellowship period. We may also need to pay minimal permission fees to libraries and archives for some images that we make freely available on our website, a standard cost associated with research in the digital age. Because we have longstanding professional relationships with librarians and curators at the major repositories for the project – the Huntington Library, UCLA,

and USC – we do not anticipate any difficulties in securing these permissions. Based on our conversations with curators, we have allocated a line in our budget to adequately cover all these costs. We do not, however, anticipate any costs associated with the monograph. The advance for a crossover book of this nature will likely cover the cost of image permissions and indexing.

By rescuing Mason’s story from undeserved obscurity, our project will benefit a wide range of readers and users. Scholars will now have access, through the project’s website, to a number of important nineteenth-century documents that were previously undigitized and scattered across several individual archives. Through our annotated maps, students and scholars will be able to connect this important chapter of African American history to the city’s geography. Through our articles and monograph, scholars will have a new body of literature to enlarge their understanding of racial and gender politics and religious life in the American West. Furthermore, general readers will learn, through Mason’s life story, about the surprisingly long reach of slavery in nineteenth-century America. That Los Angeles has such a deep connection to slavery and those who struggled against it will be unfamiliar to many readers. This is an urgent and timely message at the heart of our project – that the legacies of slavery and the struggle for racial equity could never be quarantined to the American South. They were continental in scope, and they continue to shape life in America.