SOSA Proposal Narrative

Question 1

        I am applying for SOSA for the academic period 2022–2024 to finish my book manuscript in-progress, "A Mexican Promised Land: Fugitives from Slavery and Contested Territory in the U.S. Southwest Borderlands, 1804–1865." Historians have generally focused on enslaved people who escaped to the northern United States and Canada as well as the northern abolitionists who assisted fugitive slaves. There has been limited scholarly attention about runaway slaves who fled to Mexico. My research disrupts the dichotomy of southern slavery and northern freedom by examining the experiences of fugitive slaves who escaped from Louisiana and Texas to Mexico during the nineteenth century. "A Mexican Promised Land" argues that when runaways escaped from their Louisiana and Texas owners, their journeys to freedom became linked to territorial claims, disputes over international boundaries, and white U.S. residents' property rights. Ultimately, the freedom they found was precarious and dependent on the U.S. government's relationship with Mexico.

        This project expands the public's understanding of where slavery existed and how enslaved people escaped from slavery. By looking at the fugitive slave experience in the U.S. southwest borderlands, my research includes Black people into the narrative of contested territory and displacement in the U.S.–Mexico borderlands. Typically a discussion about Indigenous people and white American settlers, the inclusion of enslaved Black people in the study of this region shows slavery as a national problem with international implications. This project also addresses the geographical limitations of the Underground Railroad. The Underground Railroad assisted fugitive slaves from the U.S. South by transporting them to different safe houses and cities and towns in the northern United States and Canada. In contrast, my work considers the ways in which enslaved people in Louisiana and Texas fled slavery in the absence of an Underground Railroad network and without an active community of abolitionists willing to help them. Including Mexico as a place where enslaved people could be free in the nineteenth century expands our notion of where freedom existed for fugitive slaves. In addition to the northern United States and Canada, Mexico also became a space of freedom.

Question 2

        "A Mexican Promised Land" is the culmination of over ten years of research and will be my first book. This work is part of my larger research interest which examines the experiences of Black Americans in Mexico in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. My second book project will look at African Americans in the twentieth century who immigrated to Mexico. In thinking about the history of Black Americans as both international and transnational, my work reimagines Black people beyond a northern and southern binary that existed throughout the nineteenth century and in much of the twentieth century. Featuring the experiences of Black people in Mexico reshapes how we think about migration and what opportunities were available to African Americans outside of the United States as they searched for freedom in the nineteenth century and for equity in the twentieth century.

Question 3

        In summer 2019 I collected dozens of Spanish-language archival sources while in Mexico City. I plan to use the SOSA release time for transcribing Spanish-language sources; reading

history monographs related to African American history, U.S. history, Mexican history, borderlands history, and U.S. slavery; and writing. Transcribing Spanish-language archival sources is a long process. Transcribing a three-page letter can be a two-hour process based on the legibility of the handwriting, the quality of the microfilm, and any damage (water damage, rips, and smudges) to the document. Most of the history books I need to consult are only available through Interlibrary Loan. Requesting and waiting for these books lengthens the amount of time I need to read these books. I anticipate completing chapter four of my book manuscript in summer 2022. Below is a timeline detailing how I will use my SOSA award.

- Fall 2022 (SOSA Semester): I will begin writing chapter five of my book manuscript, I will begin reading books for chapter six, and I will transcribe Spanish-language sources needed for chapter 6.
- Spring 2023: I will finish writing chapter five, I will finish reading books for chapter six, and I will finish transcribing Spanish-language sources for chapter six.
- Summer 2023: I will write chapter six. I will read books for the introduction and conclusion.
- Fall 2023 (SOSA Semester): I will write the introduction and conclusion of my book manuscript. I will revise chapter one of my book manuscript based on suggestions and recommendations that I received from reader reports and an editor at the University of Pennsylvania Press (UPENN Press).
- Spring 2024: I will revise chapter two of my book manuscript based on suggestions and recommendations that I received from an editor at UPENN Press and reader reports. I will send the revised book manuscript draft to peers and colleagues and will incorporate their recommendations into my book manuscript.
- Summer 2024: I will finalize and send my book manuscript draft to UPENN Press.

Question 4

I plan to submit my 90,000-word book manuscript to UPENN Press, a leading publisher in early U.S. history. In 2019 Bob Lockhart—an editor at UPENN Press—expressed interest in publishing my book. Lockhart and two historians in my field have read my book proposal and two sample chapters and believe that I have "envisioned a most attractive project that holds great potential" and that my book could be "an award winner." Upon its publication, "A Mexican Promised Land" will make important interventions in the fields of African American, U.S., Mexican, and borderlands histories. My research forces a reconsideration of how enslaved people thought about and executed their escapes as slavery extended farther south and eventually west. It also incorporates Mexicans and Indigenous groups—people who are typically excluded from discussions of slavery and freedom in the U.S. North and South—to examine their roles in aiding or hindering escapes. The intended audiences for my book will be undergraduate students; graduate students; historians who study U.S., African American, Latin American, and/ or borderlands histories; and those with a general interest in studying slavery. Because of the transnational nature of my work, I expect it to reach national and international audiences. To aid in its appeal to international audiences, I plan to have the book translated and published into Spanish within the next five years.

The History Department's disciplinary standards consider the scholarly book to be "the highest achievement in the historical discipline" (p. 5). One book and several paper presentations or invited talks are sufficient for promotion and tenure.

Question 5

Within the past five years, SOSA awards have helped me make significant progress on my book-manuscript and publish two chapters in edited collections. With my first SOSA award

for the 2016–2018 period, I proposed completing two chapter drafts of my book manuscript in-progress and submitting an article for publication. I completed drafts of chapters one and two of my book manuscript (10,417 words and 8,816 words respectively). Instead of submitting a scholarly article for publication, I contributed to an edited collection. After presenting a conference paper at the 2016 American Historical Association, a highly-selective conference in my field, historian Damian Alan Pargas asked me to contribute to his in-progress edited volume. I wrote "Design His Course to Mexico: The Fugitive Slave Experience on the Texas–Mexico Borderlands, 1850–1853" (8,089 words) for Pargas' *Fugitive Slaves and Spaces of Freedom in North America* (2018).

During the 2018–2020 period, I proposed completing a draft of chapter three of my book manuscript and submitting a second scholarly article for publication. In the 2018–2019 academic year, I drafted a book proposal (5,170 words) and sent chapters one and two to the UPENN Press to gauge its interest in publishing my work. The editor's comments and reader reports were favorable and indicated interest in publishing "A Mexican Promised Land." Both the editor and the readers made recommendations and suggestions about how to improve the chapters. I also completed a fifty percent chapter three (7,400 words). Lastly, I used this SOSA award to draft and submit another chapter for an edited collection. In May 2018 historian Ousmane Power-Greene asked me to contribute to a collection he was co-editing with Ronald A. Johnson. Instead of publishing my scholarly article with a journal, I submitted "'A Scheme to Desert': The Louisiana Purchase and Fugitive Slave Escapes in the Louisiana–Texas Borderlands, 1804–1806" (6,763 words) to be part of Johnson and Power-Greene's edited volume *In Search of Liberty* (2021).

The beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020 significantly delayed my progress on my book manuscript. With public and university libraries closed, I was unable to complete chapter three of my book and could not start working on chapter four of my book manuscript. I also could not work on other research projects like a scholarly article. When the TCNJ library reopened at the beginning of summer 2020, it suspended its Interlibrary Loan program until May 2021. This suspension also restricted my ability to complete my work because most of the books that I need to read are from other institutions. Although pandemic-related closures and staff shortages have delayed the completion date of my book manuscript in-progress by nearly a year, I believe that a 2022–2024 SOSA award will help me make-up the delays and finish the book by summer 2024.