

Reflection: Researching Slavery in Louisiana

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I honestly wasn't sure how well working with nine other people on a research project would work. Although I knew the four students from LSU a little, I had only known the five Université des Antilles students for a few days and organizing ten people seemed like it could be a complicated challenge. However, in the end, we had a weeklong academic and cultural exchange that was exciting, rewarding, and unforgettable.

On the first official day of the exchange we toured Whitney Plantation. Although I had been there before, the tour that Dr. Seck gave us was much more in-depth and informative than the one I had been on before. Since he was not subjected to the hour-and-a-half time limit and the short attention spans of the general public, we were able to spend over four hours touring the grounds and buildings of the plantation. We even went into buildings that aren't typically open to the public; it was very behind-the-scenes.

At the end of the day Dr. Seck provided us with scans of original documents on the Slave Revolt of 1811, the origins of which we saw on Tuesday when we all met at the Courthouse for the Parish of St. Charles in Hahnville. It was there in a room full of enormous binders containing thousands of legal papers that we were able to see the original handwriting on court documents that were over two hundred years old! At first they were incredibly difficult to read because of the old-fashioned language and difficult-to-decipher penmanship, but with the help of Dr. Seck and Adeline, the history experts of the group, we eventually found ourselves able to read most of the important information.

After a few hours of historical research the ten of us decided to go to New Orleans for the afternoon so that the Martiniquaises could experience the sights and sounds of the crescent city. It was an ideal day for a New Orleans excursion and the girls were able to see most of the major attractions including a musicians playing outside Cafe du monde and a woman dressed almost exclusively in feathers walking along Bourbon Street. It was a day that I'm sure none of our visiting scholars will forget!

On Wednesday and Thursday we continued our archival work and our ten-person crew organized ourselves more efficiently than any of us had anticipated. We divvied up the documents and made plans to transcribe them and summarize their contents, we discussed potential ideas for paper topics, and we engaged in lively scholarly discussions on the subject. It was as collegial an experience as I've ever had and everyone was so respectful of the perspectives and specialties of the other members of the group to the point that we were able to create unique angles from which to approach the documents in our research. Our days of "unsupervised" discussion were some of the most valuable because it became clear that, despite all of us possessing the same documents on which to base our research, we would nonetheless create ten different projects that could (hopefully) result in a collected published volume one day!

Friday was the end of our research on the German Coast Uprising and we made plans for when and how to conduct the peer-reviewing process of our papers so that we could see the results of our long hours of study with Dr. Seck's guidance. Although it was

bittersweet to know that our research group is on hold for the moment, it is also comforting to know that we will be reunited to continue our exchange in a few short months when the LSU group will be heading for the French Antilles!