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LSU-Université des Antilles Exchange
Impressions on the exchange in Louisiana

The LSU and Université des Antilles exchange constituted an invaluable opportunity of transnational academic dialogue and collaboration. Throughout the program's multiple activities and seminars, we were invited to reflect on the historical and cultural landscapes that Louisiana and the French Antilles undoubtedly share, particularly through the history and remembrance of the slave trade. As the previous readings of Édouard Glissant's *Mémoire des Esclavages* and Fabienne Kanor's *Humus* had anticipated, working on the memory of slavery was not a straightforward task of recovery. Rather, it constituted an occasion to reflect on the very nature of memorialization practices and on our role as members of academic and cultural institutions, and the diversity of experiences that inform the ways in which narratives of the slave trade are articulated.

Our visit to Whitney Plantation and our contact with the archival materials available at Hill Memorial Library raised fundamental questions concerning the very nature of the institutions and practices through which the memories of slavery are safeguarded and narrated. Facing the amount of documents where the experiences of slavery are difficultly mediated through a series of numerical records, name lists, legal documents or simply transaction bills, it is difficult not to become aware of the collaborative research effort needed to turn this raw materials into a coherent narrative that can be kept and transmitted from our position as agents in public educational and cultural institutions. How to work with the traces of experiences that are present yet more often than not silent becomes one of the problems and tasks that we must address collaboratively.

While archival and institutional salvage is necessary, the activities in the LSU-UA exchange in Louisiana also constituted an opportunity to reflect on material traces and

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practices of remembrance that sometimes fall out of the domain of traditional documentation.

Can we consider gumbo or the banjo alternative archival sources and if so, what stories do they contain? What do the streets and buildings in New Orleans tell us? The Louis Armstrong Park as the setting of the pan-Caribbean Bayou Bacchanal?

My exchanges with colleagues from LSU and the Université des Antilles who specialize in different disciplines provided me with an unique opportunity to explore these problems. More importantly, I was able to appreciate the diversity of approaches, not only methodological and academic, but also those that emerge from a sense of collective memory where different narratives coexist, compete, and sometimes clash. The discrepancies in the reception of Édouard Glissant's thinking in the U.S. and in the French Antilles, as Dr. Leupin's and Dr. Cécile Bertin's seminars revealed, emphasize the need for discussions and approaches that do not seek to homogenize the ways in which collective memory is preserved but which turns existing narrative tensions into an opportunity for further dialogue and exchange.

Listening to Fabienne Kanor's performative reading of her novel *Humus* provided me with an awareness of the affective dimension present in all individual and collective remembrance. Her work with rhythm, respiration, and invocation of simultaneously historical, imagined, and palpable experiences inspired a perspective that emphasized that the memory of slavery is not simply contained in past documents and institutions, nor is it static writing in the pages of her volume. Rather, these memories are felt, actualized, and lived. As the LSU-UA program showed me, it is through exchange, sharing, and contact that this more elusive dimension can be truly appreciated.