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**“The Restoration of French Colonial Slavery, 1802-1848”
History Project Grant Report, March 29, 2018**

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The History Project grant funded six weeks of archival research in Martinique and Guadeloupe in spring 2017 as part of a longer dissertation research trip in France, the Caribbean, and the United Kingdom. This report summarizes the aims, method, sources, and preliminary findings of the project.

My dissertation studies the reconstruction of French slavery following the Haitian Revolution and how that process shaped the ideology of enslaved people and slaveholders. The project seeks to understand nineteenth-century transformations in French racial thinking, imperialism, the slaveholding economy, and citizenship by focusing on the material and legal conditions of transatlantic slavery. It explores the crucial yet poorly understood problem of why France re-established and reinvested in slavery having abolished it in 1794.

To that end, my research studied interactions between enslaved people, slaveholders, capitalists, public authorities, and free people of color within the colonial empire, continental France and the Greater Caribbean. I focused on the islands of Martinique and Guadeloupe in the Lesser Antilles, and French Guiana in South America—all former French colonies and present-day territorial divisions of France. My sources included notary records, civil registers, official correspondence, intelligence reports, and court documents. My method was to trace practices of enslavement and manumission with reference to individual cases of enslaved and freed people discovered in the archives.

Spanning France, the Caribbean, Guiana, and Britain, these archives included:

Archives Nationales d’Outre-Mer, Aix-en-Provence
Archives Nationales, Pierrefitte-sur-Seine and Paris
Service Historique de la Défense, Vincennes
Archives Diplomatiques, Nantes and La Courneuve
Archives de la Chambre de Commerce et d’Industrie, Marseille
Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris
Archives Départementales de la Martinique, Schœlcher
Bibliothèque Schœlcher, Fort-de-France
Archives Municipales de Fort-de-France
Archives Départementales de la Guadeloupe, Gourbeyre
Archives Territoriales de Guyane, Cayenne
Archives Municipales de Cayenne
The National Archives, Kew

Through these collections I followed the paper trail of France’s imperial administration, recombining documents conserved in France with their counterparts in Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Guiana. Sources consulted in the “metropolitan” repositories illustrated French imperial policy and the broad contours of the slaveholding economy. Documents I read in Martinique, Guadeloupe and Guiana shed light on local social and economic relations. Lastly, records from the Colonial Office, High Court of Admiralty and Foreign Office at the British National Archives yielded information about the French illegal slave trade, French colonists’ revolutionary-era indemnity claims, and the foreign occupation of French slaveholding colonies during the Napoleonic Wars.

Based on this work, I have compiled hundreds of individual manumission cases and freedom disputes, which allow me to compare emancipation by legal means with the act of self-liberation through armed resistance or through *marronnage* (abandoning the plantation). I have also begun to piece together colonists’ connections to the wider French empire and to other slave-owning regions of the Americas, drawing on correspondence between colonial officials, naval officers, consuls, commissioners, lawmakers, statesmen, and political writers.

The main finding from my research is that re-enslavement defined the theoretical and practical parameters of slavery throughout the early-nineteenth-century French empire. Slave owners regularly reinvented the legal meanings of slavery and freedom to better manage their property and households. The most significant example of this was the re-enslavement of agricultural workers in Guadeloupe and French Guiana who had been liberated by the emancipation decree of February 4, 1794. Surprisingly, however, official correspondence and civil registers reveal that a similar re-enslavement of emancipated workers also took place in Martinique, a colony where the French had failed to extinguish slavery in 1794. Under the racially repressive laws of the Napoleonic era (1799-1815) and the Bourbon Restoration (1814-1830), gaining one's freedom was difficult, and retaining it equally so. The reduction of free black people to the status of second-class citizens, combined with varying restrictions on manumission, made the boundary between freedom and slavery fragile.

The second significant discovery in the archives was the role that enfranchisement of people of color played in preserving slavery under the more liberal July Monarchy (1830-1848). At that stage, a significant number of reformers in France promoted the policy of gradual emancipation in the colonies as a way to "ameliorate" slavery. Slaveholders and colonial lawmakers were quick to appropriate these policies to their own ends. The appearance of reform was a powerful legitimizing tool for those with a direct economic investment in slavery. Even reformers grew wary of radical approaches to emancipation and cautioned against hasty solutions like a British-style all-out abolition. The catch for abolitionists was that many more metropolitan French people had a personal stake in slavery through credit relationships or inheritance. The moral capital gained from yielding to reform was swiftly reinvested in lobbying the metropolitan

government for more favorable tariff protection and, ultimately, compensation for the emancipation of slaves.

The tension between enslavement and enfranchisement is central to understanding French imperial politics in the early-nineteenth century. The Napoleonic state employed tremendous military force to reverse slave emancipation and suppress anti-colonial insurrection. In the following decades, new levels of organized violence were harnessed to maintain white supremacy. Meanwhile, the memory of black empowerment under the First Republic continued to drive subaltern politics. Resistance to enslavement took many forms during this period, ranging from *marronnage* to insurgency. There were, however, few major rebellions in the French colonies from 1802 to 1848, even as slave revolt was on the rise in the Greater Caribbean. Instead, it became more common for the enslaved to negotiate the terms of their dependency through economic exchanges, such as self-purchase, the purchase of family members, land acquisition, or semi-contractual work. Such exchanges were a form of contestation over the meaning and limits of legal rights and citizenship.

The manuscript emerging from this work aims to show that after the Haitian Revolution French legislators became more, not less, committed to maintaining slavery, as part of a negotiation with colonists over property rights and the preservation of an overseas empire. The confiscation of rights of people of African descent—and specifically re-enslavement—were common practice until the 1830s when the state adopted gradual emancipation as a way to legitimize and preserve slavery.

I am grateful to the Joint Center for History and Economics and the Institute for New Economic Thinking for their generous support of my dissertation research.