

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.18817/ot.v15i26.655>***CONFEDERATE MONUMENTS, PLANTATION-MUSEUMS AND SLAVERY:  
Race, Public History, and National Identity<sup>1</sup>******MONUMENTOS CONFEDERADOS, MUSEUS DE PLANTAÇÃO E ESCRAVIDÃO:  
Raça, História Pública e Identidade Nacional******MONUMENTOS CONFEDERADOS, MUSEOS DE PLANTACIÓN Y  
ESCLAVITUD: Raza, Historia Pública e Identidad Nacional***

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**Abstract:** My primary focus in this article is on sixteen slave cabins incorporated into three heritage tourism sites in Natchitoches, North West Louisiana. The sites are Oakland Plantation, Magnolia Plantation and Melrose Plantation. How is national identity expressed and articulated at these sites; and how does consideration of slave cabins provide opportunities for highlighting and questioning issues of national identity? I seek to persuade the reader that consideration of the current representations of the slave cabins can expand our analytical intervention and broaden our understanding of the promotion of national identity at these sites.

**Keywords:** Confederate monuments. Plantation-museums. Slavery.

**Resumo:** Meu foco principal neste artigo é sobre dezesseis cabanas de escravos incorporadas em três locais de turismo de patrimônio em Natchitoches, no noroeste da Louisiana. Os locais são Oakland Plantation, Magnolia Plantation e Melrose Plantation. As questões que perpassam este trabalho são: Como a identidade nacional é expressa e articulada nesses sites? E como a consideração das cabanas de escravos oferece oportunidades para destacar e questionar questões de identidade nacional? Procuo convencer o leitor de que a consideração das atuais representações das cabanas escravas pode expandir nossa intervenção analítica e ampliar nossa compreensão da promoção da identidade nacional nesses locais.

**Palavras-chave:** Monumentos confederados. Museus de plantação. Escravidão.

**Resumen:** Mi enfoque principal en este artículo es sobre dieciséis cabañas de esclavos incorporadas en tres sitios de turismo patrimonial en Natchitoches, en noroeste de Louisiana. Los sitios son Oakland Plantation, Magnolia Plantation y Melrose Plantation. Las cuestiones que atraviesan este trabajo son: ¿Cómo se expresa y se articula la identidad nacional en estos sitios? y ¿cómo la consideración de las cabañas de esclavos ofrece oportunidades para destacar y cuestionar los problemas de identidad nacional? Intento persuadir al lector de que la consideración de las representaciones actuales de las cabañas de esclavos puede ampliar nuestra intervención analítica y ampliar nuestra comprensión de la promoción de la identidad nacional en estos sitios.

**Palabras clave:** Monumentos Confederados. Museos de plantación. Esclavitud.

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**Introduction**

At the present time in the United States, the most prominent issue in the public arena about slavery and public history concerns Confederate monuments, related to museums and the legacies of the Civil War. There are thousands of monuments to the Confederacy across the US south in public squares, government and private buildings, port and harbors, rural communities, and cemeteries. There are also schools, street names and private houses, that honor Confederate heroes and events. In the last five years, a series of highly politicized incidents, and some horrific crimes have forced them into public discussion, and have highlighted current tensions, antagonism, and conflict. This includes the murder in 2015 of nine African American women and men in a church in Charleston, South Carolina, by Dylan Roof, a 21-year-old white supremacist, and an avid supporter of the Confederacy. At the same time, a public debate took place over the continued flying of the Confederate flag on a Confederate monument near the South Carolina state building. The governor of South Carolina at the time - Nikki Haley - first defended keeping the flag, but under pressure relented, and advocated its removal. The flag was removed in 2015. During 2016, in the lead up to the election of Donald Trump, more and more whites in the south flew Confederate flags and voiced support for what they called 'white rights'. Then, in 2017, members of the white racist organization, the Ku Klux Klan, and white supremacist supporters marched in Charlottesville, North Carolina, shouting racist and anti-Semitic remarks. President Trump insisted that many of them were 'very fine people,' and that Confederate monuments should remain in place and should be removed. President Trump added 'Who's next? (George) Washington, (Thomas) Jefferson?'

Recent surveys indicate that a majority of American people want these monuments kept in place. Several prominent politicians have acted to defend them; while many others simply kept silent. At the same time, several politicians acted to remove them. For example, in May 2017, the mayor of New Orleans removed four Confederate monuments, including one of Robert E. Lee, and made a powerful statement justifying his action. These are important dates over contemporary national identity in the

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United States, and over the history and legacy of the south as a region, in creating that national identity. All elements of this identity are racialized. These current developments remind us that public history and collective memory have important consequences in contemporary life and raise important issues around what sites exist, who controls public history and unequal access to resources.

However, specialists in the United States on the public history of slavery and the Civil War know that Confederate monuments are little more than the tip of the iceberg. Moreover, that a far more extensive and deeply entrenched infrastructure of sites dedicated to a mythological memory of slavery, the Confederacy and southern history stands steadfastly in place<sup>2</sup>. At the present time, there are thousands of plantation mansion houses and related outbuildings from the period of slavery incorporated into a vast heritage tourism industry across the US South. Based on former slave plantations and structures, the sites vary considerably in size, organization, and importance. The sites contain plantation mansions, working structures and a wide range of other buildings, including slave quarters and slave cabins. Since 1994, I have personally visited more than two hundred plantation museum sites, in ten states<sup>3</sup>.

Plantation-museum sites are a formidable institutional testimony to a highly partial and distorted version of southern history. But they do not go unchallenged. At many of these plantation museum sites there are slave cabins, once occupied by the enslaved people during slavery. The mansions still receive the majority of visitors, interest, and attention; but the slave cabins offer counter-narratives that challenge the dominant representation of slavery. A comparison of representations of big houses, with representations of the cabins, reveals the competition over who controls this history. And they remind us that Confederate monuments are just one element of what is at stake.

In Louisiana, between 2005 and 2013, I visited more than 27 plantation sites, with over 60 slave cabins incorporated into heritage tourism. My primary focus in this

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<sup>2</sup> BRIGHT, C. F.; CARTER, P. L. Who are they? visitors to Louisiana's river road plantations. *Journal of Heritage Tourism*, v. 11, n. 3, p. 262–274, 2015; EICHSTEDT, Jennifer L.; SMALL, Stephen. *Representations of Slavery: race, ideology and southern plantations museums*. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2002.

<sup>3</sup> Plantation museum sites are 'sites based on physical structures that were originally used as part of plantation complexes during the period of slavery and which now are organized to provide exhibits and tours of southern history, with an exclusive or extensive focus on the period of enslavement'. EICHSTEDT; SMALL, op. cit., p. 9.

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article is on sixteen slave cabins incorporated into three heritage tourism sites in Natchitoches, North West Louisiana. The sites are Oakland Plantation, Magnolia Plantation, and Melrose Plantation. How is national identity expressed and articulated at these sites; and how does consideration of slave cabins provide opportunities for highlighting and questioning issues of national identity? I seek to persuade the reader that consideration of the current representations of the slave cabins can expand our analytical intervention and broaden our understanding of the promotion of national identity at these sites. It can also put the issues of Confederate monuments in an appropriate context.

### **Natchitoches and heritage tourism**

At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the Natchitoches region is a major destination for heritage tourism in Louisiana, attracting tens of thousands of tourists to multiple events. The city of Natchitoches promotes itself as the oldest permanent settlement in the Louisiana Purchase territory, and it possesses impressive historic buildings, natural resources, social and cultural events, museums and interpretive centers and activities. The buildings and historic structures include forts, plantations, houses, and churches; as well as parks, lakes, and forests. Many private houses are open to the public for special events, as are many of the plantations. The National Park Service (NPS) plays a key role in many of these activities.

Heritage tourism in Natchitoches highlights several themes. First, Creole families and cultural practices, such as architecture and housing, music and food - including both European families and those of mixed African and European origins. Second is the distinctive, multi-tiered racial hierarchy that prevailed in the region, and that led to the growth of a large group of legally free Creoles of color that were themselves master-enslavers<sup>4</sup>; The Creoles of color became prominent in the community, with a small group of interrelated families rising to great wealth and status. This group - the Cane River Creoles - was led by the Metoyer family and affiliated families, who

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<sup>4</sup> STERX, H. e. *The free negro in Ante-Bellum Louisiana*. Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1972; MILLS, Gary B. *The forgotten people: Cane River's Creoles of Color*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977.

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became the owners of more enslaved people than any other legally free people of color in the South<sup>5</sup>. In the 1850s they owned more than 400 enslaved people<sup>6</sup>.

A third theme is agricultural plantations and the working communities and lifestyles associated with them. Multiple plantations still exist in Natchitoches, some are still operating, and many are open for events and festivals. Slavery figures prominently in the history of several of these sites. A fourth theme is a significant emphasis placed on famous individuals, including in Natchitoches, Louis Juchereau de St. Denis and John Sibley. Several exceptional women rank high among these community notables, including important historical figures such as Marie Therese Coin Coin, Cammie Henry, Clementine Hunter and Kate Chopin. There is also a limited number of items on Native Americans.

### **Natchitoches sites and slavery**

Slavery is a prominent theme in heritage tourism in the region, and the city, where there are at least 6 former slave plantations and associated structures, and 16 antebellum slave cabins incorporated into the heritage tourism industry. Visitors can learn about the history of slavery, and slave cabins, including details of the unique aspects of colonial slavery under the French, and its legacy in the antebellum period<sup>7</sup>. Visitors also learn about class differences in the white population, about the enslaved population generally, and about a range of women.

The three most popular plantations in Natchitoches, with slave cabins currently incorporated into heritage tourism are: Oakland plantation, Magnolia plantation and Melrose Plantation. The first two are managed and operated by the National Park Service as the Cane River Creole National Historical Park (CRCNHP), which is itself part of the Cane River National Heritage Area (CRNHA), established by Congress in 1994. The park consists of Oakland and portions of Magnolia Plantations, both located

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<sup>5</sup> MILLS, Gary B.; MILLS, Elizabeth S. *Melrose: The Association for the Preservation of Historic Natchitoches*. Louisiana: Natchitoches, 1973.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> GATES, Laura (Soullière). Frankly, Scarlett, we do give a damn: the making of a New National Park. *The George Wright Forum*, v. 19, n. 4, 2002. p. 32-343.

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along Cane River in Natchitoches Parish, Louisiana, and about 10 miles from one another. The park's physical resources consist of 63 historic structures, plantation landscapes, family and plantation records, and an extensive collection of tools, equipment, furniture, and personal items. This Park highlights colonization, frontier influences, French Creole architecture, cotton agriculture, slavery and, tenancy labor systems, changing technologies and evolving social practices over two hundred years.

Oakland Plantation traces its origins to the 18th century and to Pierre Emmanuel Prud'homme, a second-generation Creole of French descent; and it remained in the hands of the same family from the 18<sup>th</sup> century through to 1998. At its peak, the family owned 145 enslaved workers living in 30 dwellings<sup>8</sup>. Oakland currently offers several self-guided tours of various outbuildings and a regularly scheduled tour of the main house<sup>9</sup>.

Magnolia Plantation traces its origin to 1753 when Jean Baptiste Lecomte acquired the land<sup>10</sup>. The plantation was extended over time and by 1860 the family owned 234 slaves, living in 70 slave dwellings<sup>11</sup>. Magnolia continued as a working plantation through the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Magnolia plantation complex currently offers several opportunities for self-guided or guided tours of various outbuildings, including the 'overseer's house/hospital' and the blacksmith's shop, but not the main house which is privately owned. A distinctive feature of the plantation is its 8 brick cabins, because very few cabins in Natchitoches, in Louisiana or indeed in the South, were constructed with bricks<sup>12</sup>. The impetus to plantation tourism took off in the late 1970s, with multiple initiatives by Bobby Deblieux, then mayor of Natchitoches.

Melrose Plantation is a not-for-profit site, owned and operated by the Association for the Preservation of Historic Natchitoches (APHN). The plantation dates to 1796 and was owned over several generations by the same family. Melrose was started

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<sup>8</sup> MILLER, Christina E.; WOOD, Susan E. *Oakland Plantation: a comprehensive subsurface investigation*. Tallahassee, Florida: Southeast Archeological Center; National Park Service, 2000. p. 19.

<sup>9</sup> HAYNIE, Sandra; CUNNINGHAM, Mary Breazeale (Ed.). *Legends of Oakland Plantation: the Prud'hommes of Natchitoches Parish*. Shreveport: La Press Co Printing, 2002. p. 15; Cf. MILLER; WOOD, op. cit., p.17.

<sup>10</sup> HAHN, Thurston H. G. III; WELLS, Tom. *Archaeological Investigations of the Magnolia Plantation Slave Quarters, Natchitoches, Louisiana*. Coastal Environments, Inc., Baton Rouge, oct. 1991. p. 29.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 30.

<sup>12</sup> VLACH, John Michael. *Back of the Big House: The Architecture of Plantation Slavery*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993.

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by Marie Therese Coin Coin, the ancestral matriarch of The Cane River Creoles, the group of mixed African and European origins that grew to be the most powerful group of master-enslavers, and owners of multiple plantations and multiple enslaved persons, in the Natchitoches region.

It began to operate as a tourist site in 1974. One of the most distinctive features of Melrose is that it is the home of legally free people of color who themselves owned significant numbers of enslaved people, a rare occurrence in antebellum slavery, and far rarer as a plantation tourist site in the 21<sup>st</sup> century South. Melrose Plantation offers two guided tours: one that visits the main house and one that visits various outbuildings, including ‘Yucca House’ and the so-called ‘African House’. Many aspects of the tour are articulated around the lives of three exceptional and outstanding women – Marie Therese Coin Coin, Cammie Henry, and Clementine Hunter.

After the Civil War, Melrose was sold to local planter Joseph Henry. When Henry died in 1898, his son John, and his son’s wife, Cammie, inherited the plantation and moved there in 1899. Cammie later turned the plantation into a writer’s colony in the 1920s through 1940 and hosted important southern writers such as Lyle Saxon, Harnett Kane, Ada Jack Carver, Ross Phares, Ruth Cross, Rachel Field, Harnett Kane and Francois Mignon. Clementine Hunter, whose parents had been enslaved, worked on the plantation throughout this period, in the fields, then as a cook, and later became an important painter. Cammie died in 1948, the plantation fell into disrepair, and was resurrected and incorporated into heritage tourism in the 1970s.

### **Natchitoches’ slave cabins**

There are sixteen 21st century antebellum slave cabins at these three sites, each of which originally housed enslaved Black or “mixed-race” inhabitants, and later, sharecroppers and tenant farmers, many until the 1960s<sup>13</sup>. There are significant differences in the origins, material construction and history of the cabins across the sites,

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<sup>13</sup> I define a ‘21st century antebellum slave cabin’ as a cabin built in the antebellum period, primarily for habitation by enslaved persons, and which has survived (restored or reconstructed) into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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as well as in their current deployment in heritage tourism. The cabins at Melrose are currently treated very differently from those at Oakland and Magnolia.

The cabins at Oakland and Magnolia are listed on the site tourist maps as ‘Slave/Tenant Quarters’. All are original to the plantations, have been substantially physically restored and have been substantially researched by professional archeologists. Visitors can see the cabins on self-guided tours, but neither site includes the cabins on the typical guided tour. The cabins are typically closed or even locked, though visitors can enter upon request. Tour guides are more than happy to provide a guided tour, including entrance into the cabins, upon request and time permitting. The cabins are empty, or have debris stored in them, though one cabin at Oakland Plantation has a temporary exhibit with general information about the life of the enslaved. Oakland currently has 2 wood and bousillage cabins, (called the ‘north slave cabin’ and the ‘south slave cabin’) and the remains of a third (called ‘the seed house’ or ‘Gabe Nargot’s cabin’)<sup>14</sup>. All are original to the site. None are in their original location but have been moved for convenience and tourism. The Oakland cabins are dated to approximately 1850s<sup>15</sup>. Magnolia Plantation cabins and quarters are dated to the 1840s or 1850s<sup>16</sup>.

Magnolia currently has 8-brick cabins (7 double pen, 1 single pen) in the location that originally had 24 quarters<sup>17</sup>. Melrose currently has five slave cabins, each of which was once occupied by enslaved persons in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. At its peak in the late 1830s Melrose had 65 enslaved persons and probably had 10 cabins<sup>18</sup>. None of the cabins at the site today is original to the site, and all were brought there from other local properties in the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century, by Cammie Henry<sup>19</sup>. She admired and valued log

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<sup>14</sup> There is also a cook’s cabin that also functioned as residence for an enslaved Black person, most likely a woman. I consider this a slave cabin.

<sup>15</sup> MIRI, Ali A. *Historic Structures Assessment Report: Oakland Plantation, Overseers house, Store and Post Office, South Slave Cabin, North Slave Cabin*, v. 2. Atlanta: National Park Service, 1998.

<sup>16</sup> YOCUM, Barbara A. *Magnolia Plantation: Building Materials Assessment and Analysis*. Massachusetts: Northeast Culture Resources Center, 1996. p. 7.

<sup>17</sup> KEEL, Bennie C. *A Comprehensive Subsurface Investigation at Magnolia Plantation*. Tallahassee, Florida: Southeast Archeological Center; National Park Service, 1999. p. 10.

<sup>18</sup> MACDONALD, K.C.; MORGAN, D. W.; HANDLEY, F. J. L. The Cane River Africa Diaspora Archaeological Project: Prospectus and Initial Results. In: HAVISER, J. B.; MACDONALD, Kevin C. (Ed.). *African Re-Genesis: Confronting Social Issues in the Diaspora*. Abingdon: University College London, 2006. p. 123-144. p. 137.

<sup>19</sup> DIARY, Cammie Henry. Cammie Henry Center, Watson Library, Northwestern State University, Natchitoches, 1934.

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cabins, wanted to save such cabins from destruction and brought them in Melrose to provide temporary housing for her guest writers in the 1930s, and 1940s. All have been moved around the site for purposes of tourism and convenience, and all have been very substantially restored.

None of the cabins at Melrose Plantation are currently identified explicitly as former slave cabins. One is labeled the “Weaving House”, and presented as the place where Cammie Henry did her weaving in the 1930s and 1940s. The second cabin is identified as the ‘bindery/gift-shop’, which is a well-stocked book and souvenir store, and the place where visitors to the site purchase tickets for the tours. The third cabin is named the “Ghana House,” and was so-named in the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century by Francois Mignon, in honor of ‘the African slaves who inhabited it’<sup>20</sup>. The fourth cabin is ‘female writer’s cabin’. Upon request, visitors can currently visit either the ‘female writer’s cabin or “Ghana House’ depending on time and availability of site interpreters. The final slave cabin is Yucca House. It occupies an important place on the guided tour of the grounds and is presented as the original house on Yucca plantation, having been built by Marie Therese Coin Coin once she became legally free. Although it is not currently presented at the site as a slave cabin, it had functioned as a slave cabin for a long time, there is evidence that enslaved people regularly lived in it, and a high likelihood that other enslaved persons visited and even slept there.

### **National Identity, Slavery, and Slave Cabins**

How do representations of slavery and slave cabins at these three sites shape representations of national identity? Heritage tourism in Natchitoches expands our understanding of the breadth of groups involved in the creation of a national identity - by including multi-ethnic whites (e.g. French-speaking and Spanish-speaking) and multi-racial groups, (e.g. French Creoles of African origins, especially wealthy ones). This particular focus has been achieved because the wealthy descendants of historically powerful families, along with local politicians and business leaders shared a common interest and sought to benefit from the promotion of tourism in this way. These interests aligned with the interests of the state – in this instance in the form of the NPS – to meet

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<sup>20</sup> MILLS. *The Forgotten...* op. cit., p. 54-55.

its public obligations of greater inclusiveness, as well as cultivating national pride among a respectful citizenry. State involvement was actively sought after and successfully secured by local actors, including descendants of family members. They profited from their social networks to raise awareness, argue their case, and secure funding and expertise. Highlighting the multi-racial, multicultural elements of Natchitoches is a key component of these activities, and its impact in the three sites is abundantly clear. While this is far more evident at Oakland and Magnolia than at Melrose, the latter benefits substantially from state involvement in these sites and across the region. Overall the state, in the form of NPS, provides leadership, expertise, and resources.

At present, the slave cabins feature prominently at the sites, but they are not central in a way that directly highlights issues of national identity. At all three sites, the cabins remain in a clear second place to information and details provided about the homes and work buildings of elite white plantation residents. I describe the representation of the cabins at Oakland Plantation and Magnolia Plantation as ‘relative incorporation’<sup>21</sup>. This means that significant attention is paid to them and to how they functioned on the plantation under slavery, and to the ways in which their inhabitants (primarily Blacks and other people of color, including so-called ‘mixed-race’) interacted with the powerful whites that owned and managed the plantation. This information is available on the website, site promotional literature, at various locations on the site (including exhibits) and during the house tour and self-guided tour. Site interpreters are also able to respond to questions about slavery, slave cabins, and enslaved people, from visitors to the site.

The situation at Melrose Plantation is fundamentally different. In heritage tourism today at Melrose Plantation, the slave cabins are symbolically annihilated, and discussions of slavery are highly circumscribed<sup>22</sup>. Almost nothing is said on the website, in site promotional literature, in the guided tours or in any of the various locations on the site about the fact that the five cabins on the site were once slave cabins. Instead, the cabins are described primarily in terms of the roles they played after slavery ended, as the residences of the (white) writers and artists that lived in them during Cammie Henry’s writer’s colony in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Information is provided at the site about slavery, but

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<sup>21</sup> EICHSTEDT; SMALL, *op. cit.*, p. 10-11.

<sup>22</sup> EICHSTEDT; SMALL, 2002, *op. cit.* p. 10.

it is almost entirely restricted to details about the lives of the Cane River Creoles, and to other legally free people of color that owned enslaved persons.

Melrose shares in common with the other two sites (and most sites across the south) a focus on elite plantation owners, key aspects of their lives and culture, and details of the architecture and interiors of the buildings in which they lived<sup>23</sup>. One major difference about Melrose Plantation, however, is that whereas the other two sites (and the majority of sites across Louisiana and the south) devote most of their attention, and the framing of the representations of southern heritage, to the elite men that owned and managed the plantations, most of who were white; at Melrose most attention is devoted primarily to women – the three exceptional women - and to the legally free people of color that owned the plantation from its inception in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, through the 1830s. In this regard, it offers a stark contrast to the preponderant representations of southern heritage at plantation museum sites across the south.

How does an analysis of these sites help up assess representations of national identity? It does so by reminding us of the irrepressible race, class and gender conventions that shape representations of national identity. First, race and gender directly shaped the institutional opportunities for success and social mobility historically. Second, race and gender shaped the ability of different groups to gain access to resources necessary to promote national identity. Third, race and gender shaped the ability of whites to get their notions of national identity institutionalized into plantation sites while making the role of black people in those sites secondary or irrelevant. The role of the state in enforcing laws of slavery and racial segregation, in sustaining class-based gender conventions and social roles, in financing and supporting public institutional representations of southern heritage that highlight elite culture, paternalism, and gentility, was important and instrumental.

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<sup>23</sup> SMALL, Stephen. Still Back of the Big House: Slave Cabins and Slavery in Southern Heritage Tourism. *Tourism Geographies: An International Journal of Tourism Space, Place and Environment*, DOI: 10, p. 1-19, 2012; ALDERMAN, Derek H.; MODLIN JR., E. Arnold. On the political utterances of plantation tourists: vocalizing the memory of slavery on river road. *Journal of Heritage Tourism*, v.11, n. 3, 2015. p. 275–289; Id. (In)visibility of the Enslaved within online plantation tourism marketing: A Textual Analysis of North Carolina Websites. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, v. 25, n. 3-4, 2008. p. 265-281.

Many of these issues are implicit in discussions of Confederate monuments. I argue that they become far more visible at these plantation museum sites, especially when slavery and slave cabins are mentioned.

Under slavery, slave cabins were ambiguous spaces. They were built above all for the profit, power, and aggrandizement of master-enslavers and their families<sup>24</sup>. They also operated as locations of social control and persecution, including sexual violence against Black women<sup>25</sup>. None of this was intended primarily for the benefit or well being of the enslaved. But slave cabins also functioned as a refuge for the enslaved and as the focal point of the Black agency including creative adaptations of language, religion, and music, as well as numerous forms of resistance and rebellion<sup>26</sup>. It is not by accident that widespread resistance to enslavement and the planning of rebellions occurred in cabins. Slave cabins under slavery also highlight the overlap of the private realm (home) and the public realm (workplace) on plantations, where race and gender conventions restricted elite white women to socially appropriate roles in the big house, while requiring Black women to perform productive labor in the fields, and reproductive labor in white and Black households<sup>27</sup>.

Twenty-first-century antebellum slave cabins also occupy ambiguous roles and reveal key elements of ambivalence among the managers and staff at the three sites described in this paper as well as among plantation museum sites in the south more generally. The 21<sup>st</sup>-century antebellum cabins at these three sites are treated with different representational strategies. At Oakland Plantation and Magnolia Plantation they 'relatively incorporated' into the sites, and significant information is provided about them. However, much of this information is presented via tactics of euphemism or evasion. It is infrequent that the harsh realities of slavery are confronted or expressed at

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<sup>24</sup> VLACH, op. cit.

<sup>25</sup> VLACH, op.cit.; JONES Jacqueline., *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work, and the Family, From Slavery to the Present*. Vintage Books, New York, 1986.

<sup>26</sup> CRAFT, Ellen and CRAFT, Running A Thousand Miles to Freedom. *The Escape of Willam and Ellen Craft from Slavery*, Louisiana State University Press, Baton Rouge, 1999 (with Foreword by R. J. M. Blackett); GLYMPH, Thaviola 'Liberty Dearly Bought': *The Making of Civil War Memory in African American Communities in the South*." *Time Longer than Rope: A Century of African American Activism*, edited by Charles M Payne, and Adam Green, New York University Press, 2003.

<sup>27</sup> JONES Jacqueline., *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work, and the Family, From Slavery to the Present*. Vintage Books, New York, 1986; GLYMPH, Thavolia, *Out of the House of Bondage. The Transformation of the Plantation Household*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge and New York, 2008.

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the sites. At Melrose, the cabins are ‘symbolically annihilated’ and we hear little or nothing about the fact that they were ever slave cabins at all. Instead, they appear primarily as the residences of 20<sup>th</sup> century white writers. In this regard, the cabins are largely erased, neglected or sanitized in representations at the site.

An examination of these cabins reminds us that behind the grandeur and beauty of the big houses, the luxuries of the interiors and the pleasures and joys of wining and dining that took place within them was an entrenched racialized system of backbreaking labor, exploitation, and suffering.

### **Conclusion**

Confederate monuments are at the forefront of public discussion of US slavery and its legacies at the present time. But there are many more buildings, structures, and monuments that still exist today, that were built during slavery, and that provide a far broader and deeper understanding of the past. They also provide greater insights into the contestation over the past in the present moment – than Confederate monuments do. Consideration of slavery and 21<sup>st</sup> Century antebellum slave cabins at heritage sites in Natchitoches provides insights into the dynamics of public history and the institutionalization of collective memory. It reminds us that collective memory also requires social forgetting. Confederate monuments are there to remind the current generation of people regarded as heroes, but they are also there to help us forget that these heroes created and exploited victims. Moreover, while the heroes are white, the victims are Black. The slave cabins highlight the multifaceted struggles – cultural, ideological, political, all shaped by race, gender, and class – over social remembering and social forgetting. They also provide insights into divergent elements of national identity.

For more than 90 years following the Civil War, war sites, museums, monuments, and memorials built and popularized by white southerners have promoted a narrow, white, masculinist notion of Southern history, the Civil War, and slavery<sup>28</sup>. This contributed directly to the narrow and hegemonic notions of national identity prevalent in the South and perpetuated distorted images of the enslaved, both women and men.

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<sup>28</sup> SAVAGE, Kirk. *Standing soldiers, kneeling slaves: race, war, and monument in Nineteenth-Century America*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press Princeton, 1997; BLIGHT, David. *Race and Reunion: the Civil war in American History*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001.

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Similar practices have also been common at plantation museum sites<sup>29</sup>. But these distortions did not go unchallenged and today, more than ever before there are alternative representations of slavery and the Civil War.

A focus on slavery and slave cabins promotes far greater consideration of how the wealth and identity of the successful white elite was based on the labor and the contributions of the enslaved (and of whites that did not own enslaved property); greater consideration of how and why the distinctive third racial caste of legally free people of color emerged in Natchitoches, and across Louisiana. A focus on this kind would allow us to bring in far more information on the cultural contributions of a far greater section of Africans and their descendants, than just the tiny elite; and it could place greater emphasis than currently on the experiences of the majority of the population in this region. A focus on Confederate monuments does none of this.

Even more significant research and representations like this have occurred in recent decades, with greater explicit attention to slavery than ever before, and many more encompassing initiatives are underway<sup>30</sup>. Examining heritage tourism in Natchitoches offers insights into the practical ways that this can be done, and highlights some of the factors conducive to better representations. Furthermore, these are issues that are relevant to a wide range of other nations and locations where slavery and its legacies are institutionalized in multiple sites of tourism<sup>31</sup>.

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<sup>29</sup> EICHSTEDT; SMALL, op. cit.; ALDERMAN; MODLIN JR., op. cit.

<sup>30</sup> SMALL, Stephen "Social Mobilization and Public History of Slavery in the United States", in Eurocentrism, Racism, and Knowledge. Debates on History and Power in Europe and the Americas, Marta Araújo and Silvia Rodríguez Maeso (Editors), 2015, pp. 229-246.; HORTON, James; HORTON, Lois (Ed.). *Slavery and Public Memory: the Tough Stuff of American Memory*. New York: New Press, 2006.

<sup>31</sup> AUTRY, Robyn. *Desegregating the Past: the public life of memory in the United States and South Africa*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2017; NIMAKO, Kwame; SMALL, Stephen. Collective Memory of Slavery in Great Britain and The Netherlands. In: SCHALKWIJK, Marten; SMALL, Stephen (Ed.) *New Perspectives on slavery and colonialism in the Caribbean*. The Hague: Amrit Publishers, 2012. p. 92-115; SMALL, Stephen. Slavery, colonialism and the transformation of Museum Representations in Great Britain: Old and New Circuits of Migration. *Human Architecture; Journal of the Sociology of Self-Knowledge*, n. 4, 2011, p. 27-38.