

Contextualizing Xavier's Historic Relationship to Racism

A Virtual Discussion Series on Truth, Racial Healing and Reconciliation

How does understanding the past help us recognize racism and act against it?

Events discussed in this series did not involve the university directly, but they were part of the context in which students and Jesuit leaders made choices about race and enslavement.

We share with earlier generations the fact that we make decisions, large and small, about how we respond to the systemic racism around us. Sometimes even the choices are invisible to us; these presentations seek to help us make them visible.

When Toussaint Said No

A Story of Slavery, Resistance, and a Louisiana Sugar Plantation's Ties to Xavier University

Tuesday, Feb. 16, 7:00 pm

In the summer of 1858, a man named Toussaint, one of many enslaved on the sugar plantations of southern Louisiana, killed his master, Constant Melançon. This incident serves as the focal point of a research project on the sociocultural dynamics of St. James Parish, a largely French-speaking area on the Mississippi River, from Louisiana's colonial period up to the Civil War. Like many families there, the Melançons were of Acadian background, their ancestors having been deported by the British from Nova Scotia in the mid-18th century before settling in lower Louisiana. This talk explores the history of the Melançon family as a case study to understand the role of Acadians in the sugar industry, the experiences of Afro-Creoles and African Americans enslaved by them, and the links to Xavier University, where Constant and his brothers studied in the 1840s.

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A native of northwest Louisiana, **Dr. Clint Bruce** holds the Canada Research Chair in Acadian and Transnational Studies (CRÉAcT) at Université Sainte-Anne in Nova Scotia. His research focuses on the Acadian diaspora, Creole identity in Louisiana, and the Francophone Atlantic world. He has a Ph.D. in French Studies from Brown University. His book *Afro-Creole Poetry in French from Louisiana's Radical Civil War-Era Newspapers: A Bilingual Edition* was recently published by The Historic New Orleans Collection.

Discussion by **Kelly Schmidt**, Xavier alumna, PhD candidate at Loyola University Chicago, research coordinator of The Jesuits, Slavery, History, Memory and Reconciliation Project and **Mich Nyawalo**, Ph.D., Assoc. Professor, Critical Ethnic, Black/Race Studies, Gender & Diversity Studies Program, Xavier University.

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