

<b>Institution: University of Sussex</b>
<b>Unit of Assessment: UoA 30 History</b>
<b>Title of case study:</b> Sugar, Slavery and Society: Shaping perceptions of slavery and emancipation
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b></p> <p><i>Sugar, Slavery and Society</i> engages public audiences in some of the most enduring issues in American history. Based on extensive international collaboration with educators and publicists, the project deepens public understanding of slavery and emancipation. More specifically, it helps to shape how the controversial issues of slavery and emancipation are taught in secondary schools and represented by the heritage industry. In partnership with health-care providers, the project also advances public engagement with historical questions of public health. The project has a strong online presence that further facilitates public engagement with the ethical and historical issues it raises.</p>
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b></p> <p>This project addresses fundamental questions in American history. What was the nature of slavery, why was plantation agriculture so profitable, why did enslaved people die in such staggering numbers, and what was the legacy of slavery in nineteenth-century America? To answer these questions, the project focused on sugar – the definitive plantation crop of the Americas – and centred on Louisiana, the last of the New World sugar colonies, where nineteenth-century slavery reached its most modern, advanced form. The research was undertaken by Follett at Sussex from 1999 to present, with collaborators in the USA, Canada, the European Union and Australia.</p> <p>The project outputs include a critical mass of original, innovative and accessible scholarship in a range of formats: a major, publicly accessible digital resource on the American sugar economy, rated ‘outstanding’ by the Arts and Humanities Research Council; two award-winning books; a range of additional outputs on public health in slave societies (US and Caribbean); a portfolio of public dissemination, including popular magazines, public history lectures, freely available documentary websites; and the production of films for <i>Teachinghistory.org</i>, a high-traffic site for US high-school educators, almost 5,000 of whom have downloaded videos produced by Follett on how to teach American slavery. Follett is considered, according to <i>Oxford Bibliographies Online</i>, ‘the foremost authority’ on sugar slavery in the United States.</p> <p>Based on Follett’s work, we now understand the operation of a major plantation system and the place of sugar as a fundamental determinant in the economic and social relations of production. Follett explores how sugar slavery combined capitalist and pre-capitalist elements in a novel manner and how the structure of the master–slave relationship underpinned the economic success and modernity of American sugar. While capitalism and slavery advanced in tandem, Follett also demonstrated how the practices of slavery continued to influence race relations after emancipation. Sugar slavery stamped its footprint on demography, too, influencing birth rates, natural increase, and public health on American and Caribbean plantations. Project outputs also include a major publicly accessible digital research project on American sugar. Follett’s team produced a novel, analytically rigorous, tool to consider the interplay of core factors within plantation societies: economic performance, technology, environment, race, labour and modernisation. Two fully searchable data and documentary resources (based on 90 separate interpretive fields) enable users to conduct micro and macro queries over time. Few historians had previously attempted such ambitious resource-creation/enhancement projects and no other publicly accessible documentary resource of comparable size or detail exists in US social history. The transnational dimension to Follett’s research led him to co-found the journal <i>Atlantic Studies</i> in 2003, now a field-leading title.</p>

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In sum, Follett's research offered new interpretations of slavery and modernisation, challenged prevailing assumptions of slavery and human agency, provided new digital resources, and demonstrated how sugar cast its lengthy shadow over life, labour and death in tropical, plantation America.

### 3. References to the research

**R1** Follett, R., Foner, E. and Johnson, W. (2012) *Slavery's Ghost: The Problem of Freedom in the Age of Emancipation*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

**R2** Follett, R. (2005) *The Sugar Masters: Planters and Slaves in Louisiana's Cane World, 1820–1860*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press.

This publication won the Gulf South History Book Award 2006, the Louisiana Literary Award 2006 and the British Association for American Studies Book Prize 2006, and was a Finalist in the 2006 Frederick Douglass Prize and *Choice* Outstanding Academic Title.

**R3** *Race and Labour in the Cane Fields: Documenting Louisiana Sugar, 1845–1917* (May 2008) [www.sussex.ac.uk/louisianasugar](http://www.sussex.ac.uk/louisianasugar) (AHRC & SSHRC Research Project, 2003–2008; assessed 'outstanding' by AHRC).

**R4** Burnard, T. and Follett, R. (2012) 'Caribbean slavery, British abolition and the cultural politics of venereal disease in the Atlantic world', *The Historical Journal*, 55(2): 427–451.

Outputs can be supplied by the University on request.

#### Research grants

- *Arts and Humanities Research Council Project Grant: Race and Labour in the Cane Fields: Louisiana Sugar, 1845–1917* (£64,380)
- *Social Science and History Research Council of Canada Project Grant: Documenting Louisiana Sugar, 1845–1917* (\$139,000 CAD/£76,745). Project rated 'outstanding' by both councils.

### 4. Details of the Impact

Recent years have seen a growing public engagement with slavery on both sides of the Atlantic. The subject is one of the compulsory history topics in the UK National Curriculum, provides the focus of numerous museum exhibitions and has stimulated a new interest in heritage tourism. This engagement with the history of slavery demonstrates an on-going search for social justice on the issue of race.

Follett's research informs the teaching of slavery in schools and universities. In 2009, Teachinghistory.org – a high-traffic education website produced by George Mason University and the US Department of Education and providing teaching material for high-school and university instructors – produced a downloadable video on Follett's research. The video focused on teaching methods and how to interpret different narratives of slavery. It was included as one of the 'examples of historical thinking' and is designed to assist educators with best practice in using primary sources [see Section 5, C1]. The film has been widely accessed on the *Teachinghistory* website and digital classroom. According to Google Analytics, the video has had 6,468 page views since launching in October 2009 and 2,692 unique page views. It is also available in episodic form on YouTube, where it has attracted 886 views [C2]. In addition to high schools, Follett's scholarship is employed widely in teaching at HEIs. *The Sugar Masters* is a core text for courses taught on both sides of the Atlantic. In the US, this includes Auburn, Brown, Elon, Georgetown, Louisiana, Louisiana State, Mississippi State, New York, Rutgers, Shippensburg, Southern

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Mississippi and Tulane. UK institutions include East Anglia, Portsmouth, Warwick and New York University, London. Beyond classroom use, *Sugar, Slavery and Society* serves as an important resource for a public increasingly engaged with family history, and the *Race and Labour* digital research project is publicly accessible on the web for use by genealogists and public historians. One user exclaimed: 'Found ancestral papers and learned so much about family history previously undisclosed...Thank you – you have inspired me' [C2].

Follett's research has also contributed to the cultural heritage of slavery and to promoting public education in the Louisiana tourist industry. His book *The Sugar Masters* bridges the divide between scholarship and public knowledge. It won numerous awards, including the Louisiana Literary Award for the most outstanding contribution by a book in any genre to public understanding of the state. *Louisiana Cultural Vistas*, the primary arts and culture periodical in the state with over 50,000 readers, republished and fully illustrated part of the book [C3]. Follett's scholarship has also been publicly disseminated through popular publications such as *BBC History Magazine* [C4] and online resources, including the Louisiana state encyclopaedia [C5]. *The Sugar Masters* is also available for purchase at tourist sites across Louisiana, including many of the plantation houses discussed within it. This includes the Evergreen, Laura and St Joseph's plantations, the Rural Life Museum and the West Baton Rouge Museum. The reach of the book beyond an academic readership has contributed to the sale of 2,400 copies since 2008. *The Sugar Masters* informs the intellectual content of plantation and museum tours and is promoted to visitors interested in furthering their knowledge of state history. At the West Baton Rouge Museum, for example, the book is integral to training tour guides in the interpretation of historical artefacts to the public. According to museum education curator Jeannie Lockett, 'The book is a perfect complement to the tour and interpretive programming' [C6]. Follett's research is used by organisations including the New Orleans Research Collaborative and the Southern Foodways Alliance to promote public interest in Louisiana's distinctive culinary traditions [C7] and even to provide historical context for visitors planning motorhome tours of the state [C8].

Follett's public lectures on slavery and emancipation further promote broader understanding of often-controversial aspects of history. In the US, this included addresses at public symposia in Louisiana in 2011 and 2013. According to an attendee at the second event, Follett's lecture demonstrated the importance of studying the past as a means to inform contemporary public debate about race: 'Absolutely! Makes one realize that we need to look at the past to learn better ways forward' [C9]. In the UK, Follett gave the Marcus Cunliffe Lecture at Sussex, a public event that resulted in the publication of *Slavery's Ghost* (2011), a cutting edge but accessible book co-authored with two of the most distinguished American historians, Eric Foner and Walter Johnson [see Section 3, R1].

Slavery remains a troubling aspect of the past that Follett's research has, through collaboration with non-academic partners, helped to preserve, explain and underline its enduring relevance.

## 5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- C1** Follett, R. (2009) *Examples of Historical Thinking: Narratives of Slavery*. November 2009. <http://teachinghistory.org/best-practices/examples-of-historical-thinking/23459>
- C2** <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UrxymbbSxVDU>  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qG3Hhz-TdtI>  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0wHgTxD9dil>  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IIEd271v2w4>
- C3** <http://hill.blogs.lib.lsu.edu/2008/07/documenting-louisiana-sugar-1845-1917/>
- C4** <http://www.nxtbook.com/nxtbooks/leh/lcv-summer07/index.php?startid=44>
- C5** <http://stravaganzastravaganza.blogspot.co.uk/2012/10/the-sex-taint-of-slave-owners.html>

**Impact case study (REF3b)**

- C6** Curator, West Baton Rouge Museum to Richard Follett, email, 12 September 2013.
- C7** [www.westbatonrougemuseum.com](http://www.westbatonrougemuseum.com)
- C8** <http://nolaresearch.org/bibliographies/bibliography-culinary>
- C9** [http://www.tiffinmotorhomes.com/pdfs/rough/RIS\\_volume7number3.pdf](http://www.tiffinmotorhomes.com/pdfs/rough/RIS_volume7number3.pdf)
- C10** Questionnaire – Kin and Cane Symposium (April 2013)