

Remembering the Haitian Revolution in France

Introduction

The Haitian Revolution was the first successful slave revolt, taking place between 1791 and 1804, in what was at the time a French Caribbean colony (St Domingue). Toussaint Louverture was the architect of the revolution but was captured and imprisoned in France at the Fort De Joux in 1802, and died there before Haiti gained its independence. The revolution is seen as a catalyst for the gradual abolition of slavery around the world, and therefore played an important part in shaping the modern world.

Aims

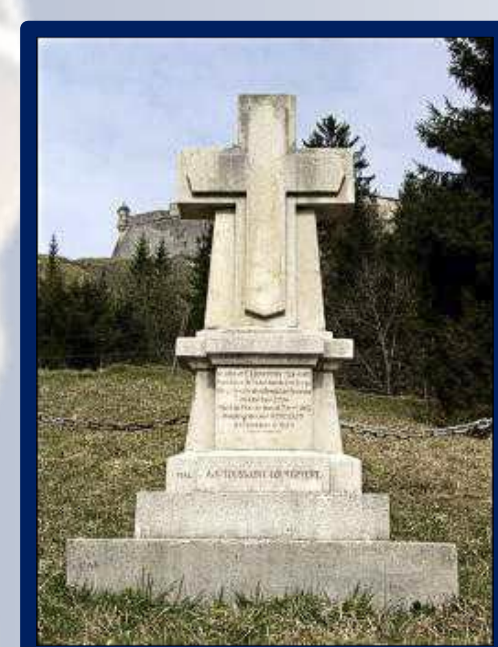
This research project investigated how France remembers the former colony through heritage sites, events and school education. The project also aimed to analyse how far France acknowledges the victims of slavery in its colonies and the extent to which commemoration focuses upon abolition and abolitionists.



Monument to slavery in Drancy

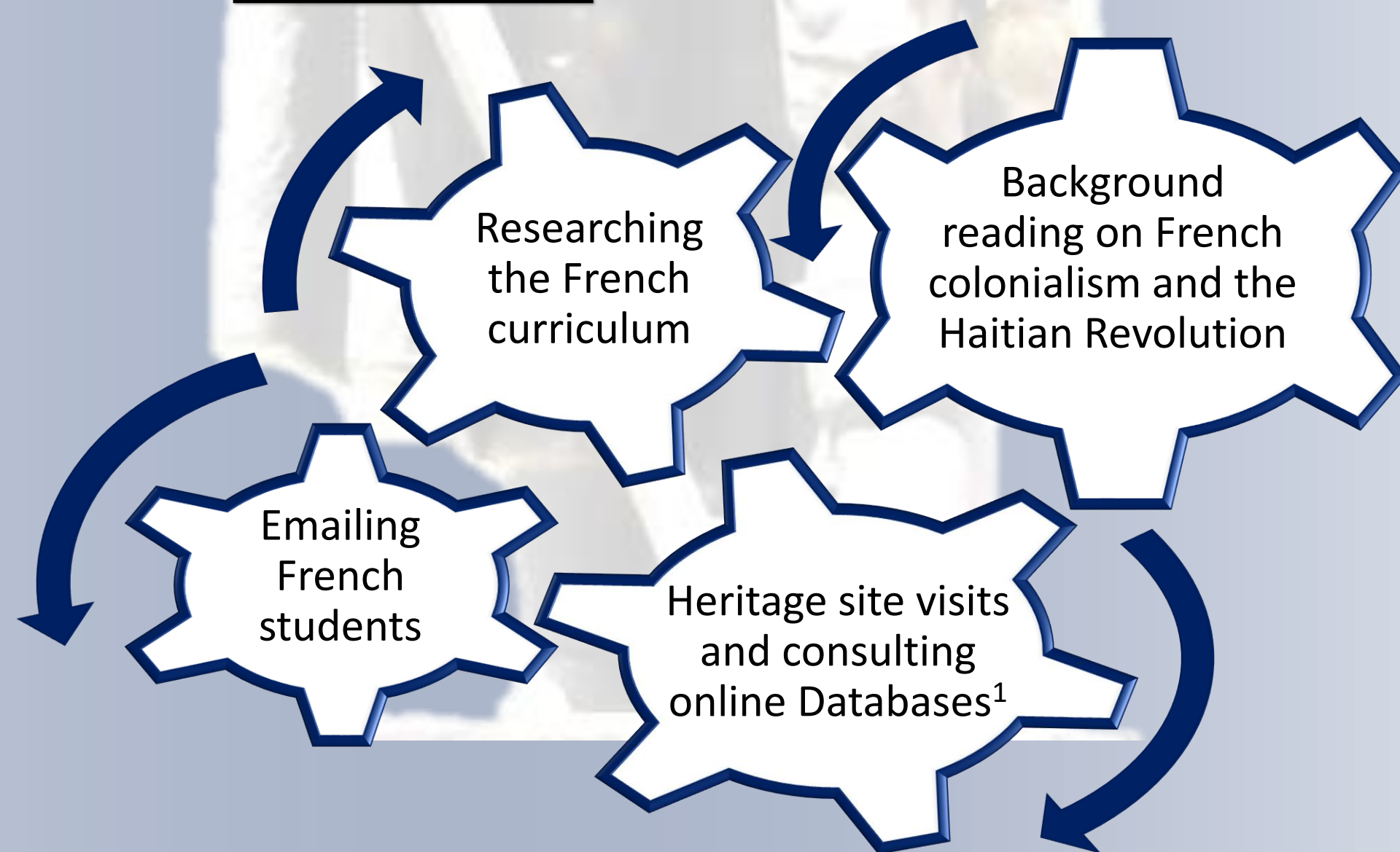


Square dedicated to Louverture in Clos-Sainte-Lazare



Fort de Joux statue for Toussaint Louverture

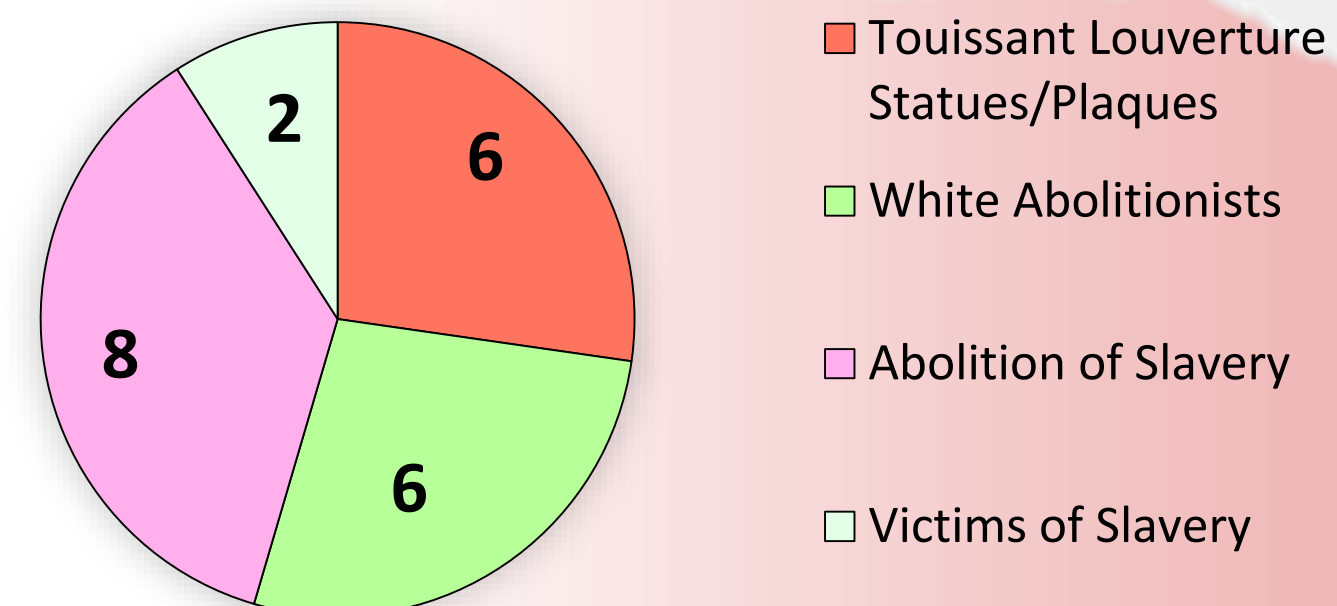
Method



Findings

Monuments

Monuments acknowledging slavery in France



Events

Slavery Remembrance Day – May 10th

The anniversary of France's declaration of slavery as a crime against humanity

Does this link to abolition detract from recognition of their culpability in centuries of slavery in the French colonies?

We learnt about the colonies as a discovery... my education of slavery in school was about American plantations and French abolitionists.

Education

It is not a question of understanding but of memorizing a set of facts that teaches of a "national conscience"... spreading a selection of facts that symbolize the preferred image of a nation's growth².

- Nelly Schmidt, UNESCO

French High School Curriculum does not oblige French colonial power or the Haitian Revolution be taught, it is an optional topic within 18th and 19th Century topics³.

- Lea Thomas, Nimes, 21

Discussion

- No specific monument is dedicated to the 691,083 slaves brought to Saint Domingue⁴ or the victims of the Haitian Revolution
- Only the Fort de Joux references that Touissant Louverture died in France as a prisoner of war during the Haitian Revolution
- Heritage sites place unwarranted emphasis on abolition, and make little or no explicit reference to the victims of slavery
- There are more statues for three white abolitionists: Scholecher (1), Jahouvery (3) and Gregoire (1) than for the victims of French slavery (2)
- In 2004, France dismissed Haiti's request to pay back 90 million gold francs (2.7 billion) in reparations⁵
- French students are told the story of French expansion, but not about the negative consequences of colonialism
- French remembrance focuses on the abolition of slavery, rather than on the enslaved themselves