

History 2301E Community-Based Research: Antislavery in 19th Century London

Reflection Paper: Timur Malik

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Throughout the course of the 2014 academic year, I have been fortunate enough to be working on a class learning based project. The project was centered on London's antislavery movement in the 19th century, through this, students are able to understand Canada's role in US history and the part played by the former in the push to abolition. Through strong cohesiveness and communication, the class was able to put together a public event focused on the theme of antislavery then and now. The class had been split up into various groups based of personal interest and each group had their own responsibilities. However, each group had a duty to do their part, because the groups could not progress toward our end goal as each fed off one another. Several goals were accomplished; research had been done through various archives along with primary and secondary source analysis, a social media presence for the event had been established, interviews had been done, and finally, a website had been built to further promote the event.

I was part of the class's communication section, one that was crucial to the event and spreading awareness of it. Several challenges arose during the process of establishing awareness for the event, mainly technological and academic. Throughout the activity, our group had a strong sense of unity, and we utilized strong teamwork to overcome many of the challenges we were faced, such as; how could we appeal what we had learned throughout the year to the general public? What select images and quotes would represent not only what we were attempting to accomplish, but represented the issues in a respectful and politically correct manner? Our group had to take several factors into consideration, living in a techno-centered society, the influence of the Internet made outreach much easier but at the same time, something to be careful with, and present our event in the right light. It is important to understand that the community based learning project is not only an good way to learn material crucial to history, but also further development in aspects of life not academia related. Furthermore, the CBL helped me understand the ways history is understood in society, and the role of different mediums (such as the internet), in its development.

Being part of the communications team, myself along with four other peers of mine were able to successfully reach out to certain demographics, which we thought would be interested in the opportunity to attend our event. We were the main group responsible for promoting the event and dealt mainly with portraying the event in a light that we thought could attract the most people. The group had to maintain a strong and open line between the event group and the web building group, because of our specific assigned tasks, both these groups relied on our work to ensure the event went smoothly and everyone was on the same page for it. My team's responsibilities included creating a poster that we could not only post around campus and various other locations, but one that would fit with the design of the website. Furthermore, reaching out and emailing certain groups was a necessary step in achieving our collaborative goal of attaining as many attendees as possible, some group members also participated in different sorts of interviews so the event would gain exposure. I was part of a two man subdivision within our group to help design the event poster to what we believed it to be the most suitable for the event,

something which represented the event in a way that we thought reflected what the event really was about. The poster reflected the colors of our school, Huron University College, along with information regarding the event, the time, date, location, and finally links to social media pages where anyone interested could find out more about the event. After the creation of this poster, we ensured it approved and sent it in to the web creation team to upload. After this myself and two other individuals on the team started to put up posters around campus and local malls to attract as many people as possible. In terms of location of choice, we sat down as a group and decided where we thought we could draw the most attention to the project, so we had decided to put up posters in two malls, Masonville mall and Cherry Hill mall. In terms locations closer to us, we decided to put up posters around the University Community Centre (UCC), the Huron Student Activity Centre (SAC) and along certain bus lines around campus. We had to ensure these posters were up by a reasonable time in anticipation of the event in order to fully gain the exposure we wanted and to fill out the location as much as possible. While all this was occurring, other members of our team had to make sure that the Twitter page for the eventⁱ was being updated constantly with news and general information regarding the speaker and topic. One member was put in charge of the twitter page, while two other members handed public relations, such as radio interviews and interviews for the website. With strong collaboration, the event brought out a solid number of students, professors, and individuals who were simply interested in the topic, and as a whole, the event can be considered as a huge success. While everything panned out in the end, our group did face certain challenges, some of which we were able to overcome, some of them however, were out of our hands.

Almost all of our group's challenges were technical, and required the ability to be adept with certain technologies and websites. The challenges presented to us also required every member of our group to be able to speak in a manner that represented our class and project, and utilize the proper vocabulary to accomplish the same goal. Our earliest challenge was the organization of the poster, which, surprisingly was much harder than expected to do. One other classmate and myself attempted to use Adobe Photoshop to create the poster, which required both of us to use our technological skills and create a finished product that everyone in the class could be proud of. After a few attempts and acclimating ourselves to the program, we were able to finally put together the poster that we thought could perfectly fit our class goals and represent the event in the right light. With limited space on the poster, the right information needed to be written down in order to efficiently and accurately detail the goals of the event. After all the required information, we decided to use a quote that would add to the poster and finally, embody what we perceived to be the end-learning goal of the event. The quote we decided to use was taken from the website of the speaker that we had coming in, Carol Faulkner of Historians Against Slavery, the quote was "Boycotting Slavery, Then and Now"ⁱⁱ. In the end, we feel we chose images, quotes, and information that accurately represented the event while being an attractive poster, and at the same time maintaining the integrity of the event, speaker, and topic. Some group members such as myself, had never been on the twitter sphere and required some

explanation as to how to operate accounts on the website in order to fully utilize the capabilities of it. Since some only two of our group members were familiar with it, we left it in their hands to decide who was in charge, but made sure everyone in the group had the skillset to operate the account if need be.

Moving beyond the technical challenges that arose through the process, another area in which we had issues with was the ability to link our group's job description with the historical value of the subject. We mainly were responsible for outreach and required a sharp tongue, so of course, a solid knowledge of the topic was necessary when speaking to anyone about the event, as we were the representatives for our class to the outside world. Utilizing the information from the textbook, *Voices of Freedom*ⁱⁱⁱ, and applying it to my work beyond the poster was tough, as no other task I completed really required it. This was by far, our biggest intellectual dilemma, unlike some of the other groups such as the research group and website building group. Only two of the group member's had the opportunity to express everything they had learned during lectures, the class trip, and through the textbook when they spoke on the radio. The rest of us, while we had a good grasp on the material through all our work, didn't have the same opportunity, and had to limit information we chose to express because of the nature of our tasks (i.e. the poster). On the hand, what we could have expressed would have been too much because of the amount we had learned from this project. Through active group and class work, and constantly having to be connected with everything that was going on, the amount of information absorbed was much more than I had expected.

An exciting event, with an even more important and crucial message, the Huron University College American history class put together a spectacular event that was thoroughly enjoyed by all. The message delivered by Dr. Carol Faulkner was one that was applicable to all, not just history students. Encouraging and urging everyone to help put a stop to modern day slavery was one of the more practical and interesting talks heard by most students and faculty, and an important issue in modern day. Stretching beyond the norms of the idea of slavery strictly in the 3rd world, Dr. Faulkner was able to enlighten many students on the issue of slavery globally and what steps could be done to help stop it from occurring in the future. Dr. Faulkner brought a unique perspective of applying past mistakes on slavery and applying it to modern day issues, she was able to utilize her historian background and relate it to the issue to paint a image that called for action from all that were able. Historians Against Slavery is a great organization and one that ties together what history is really about, weaving together past and present, analyzing what happened in the past to create a brighter, more productive, and more secure future for all. Picking up this theme in the future could be an interesting project for the class in years to come. While our class focused on how London played a part in stopping the slave trade early on, and what can be done now to stop the slave trade from occurring; future classes may want to consider exposing issues surrounding slavery closer to home, specifically North America and Europe. While most of the issues and topics discussed were around 3rd world countries, Dr. Faulkner did touch on the issues of slavery in developed nations, it would be interesting to see which

historians are involved in stopping slavery from happening within the border of our nation, the United States, and Mexico. In conclusion, the community based learning project was one of the more rewarding and knowledge filled experiences I was fortunate enough to be a part of in my time at Western university; a project that I thoroughly enjoyed working on, and something I will remember and look back on as a truly positive experience throughout the course of my university career.

Bibliography

ⁱ <https://twitter.com/ldnslavehistory>

ⁱⁱ "Carol Faulkner." *Historians Against Slavery*. Accessed April, 2015.

<http://www.historiansagainstsavery.org/main/our-volunteers/carol-faulkner/>.

ⁱⁱⁱ Foner, Eric. *Voices of Freedom: A Documentary History*. New York: W.W. Norton, 2005.