

What Lies Beneath:
Erasure and Oppression at Place Royale, Montreal



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Place Royale, in Old Montreal, is a celebrated site, rich in a layered history that is older than the origins of this city. Situated between St. Paul Street and rue de la Commune Ouest, it is a public square where modernity and history collide. It also has a controversial past and is the site of difficult histories. In 1992 it became the foundation – both literally and conceptually – of the Pointe-à-Callière Museum of Archaeology and History of Montreal to mark the 350th anniversary of the founding of Montreal, and is valued today as an exceptional archaeological site pre-dating the birth of the city. The museum presents this square as a site of collective history and pride. However, research into the site reveals accounts of torture, public executions, and a history of slavery in Montreal and New France all relating to Place Royale. These events occurred at the square during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries but have been erased from the visual and historical narratives of this site. In this essay I will argue that Place Royale is a highly charged political site that has been transformed into a static space whose spatial appearance and historical narratives comply with a selective and romanticized reading of the history of Montreal.

To facilitate my discussion of the spatial politics of Place Royale today, several key areas will be considered. First, I will give an overview of preferred historical narratives that are well documented in the museum's exhibits and in publications about Place Royale. Second, I will discuss the architectural design and its consequences for public access to the history of the space. Third, I will also look at instances of oppression and violence experienced by slaves and accused criminals in this historic public space as a critical counterpoint to the absence of any markers of these histories at Place Royale today. Since its creation in 1992, the design of the square, in conjunction with Pointe-à-Callière Museum's narration of this site, has rendered controversial

histories largely invisible. To better understand this historical disconnect, my discussion will be framed through the views of John Urry, Alan Gordon, and the *tourist gaze*. Finally, through the design and use of the square today, I will consider how politically favourable archaeological history has been legitimized for the tourist, while painful social and ephemeral histories have been erased.

Existing scholarship surrounding Place Royale and its design as part of the Pointe-à-Callière Museum has focused on its role as a center for commerce and trade, and on its architectural and archaeological significance for the history of Montreal. Research has been published on the justice system in New France by authors including Raymond Boyer and Andre Lachance, and the research findings and publications of Marcel Trudel regarding slavery in New France are significant. However, no academic writing looks to combine these elements to better understand what has been commemorated and forgotten at Place Royale. The intent of this essay is to connect and contribute to these discussions.

The architectural design of the square and the museum's narratives present a popular understanding of Place Royale. They focus on its history as a central market place in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and as the former site of the customs house in the nineteenth century. Its current name was given to honour a site that Samuel de Champlain mentioned when he came to the area in 1611. The renaming took place in May 1892 as part of the 250th anniversary of the settlement of Ville Marie.¹ Prior to this, from the mid-seventeenth century until the early eighteenth century, it was known as the Place Publique and was the main

¹ Guy Pinard, "Exception faite de la place du fort de Ville-Marie, l'emplacement connu sous le nom de place Royale fut la première place publique d'importance à Montréal," *La Presse* [Montreal] (29 Nov. 1989): A8.

square where a public market was held twice a week.² In the mid-1600s it was also known as the Place d'Armes for military training and formations. By 1786 wooden stalls in two rows were built for market days, and by 1815 a permanent wooden hall was built down the centre.³ The hall can be seen in the rare watercolour sketch, *Lower Market* from 1829 by James Patterson Cockburn.⁴ Cockburn, an English military official, created many sketches and paintings during his time in Quebec in the early 1800s, offering valuable insights into the built environment of Montreal at the time.

Lower Market shows an idyllic vision of the market square. With the St. Lawrence River in the background, Cockburn depicts the row of buildings that served as the military guards' house in 1664, later as a royal bakery, and finally as the Wurtele Inn in 1802. These were demolished in 1838, effectively opening the square to public access from the water and expanding the harbour view, as it remains today.⁵ This sketch illustrates the public use of the market space and is a picturesque representation of the site, chronicling members of the middle and upper classes browsing the vendors' stalls. It is also an example of how historical documentation of the market has been complicit in the erasure and exclusion of the darker histories and public uses of the square. This erasure is created through omission in both written and visual narratives.

By 1836 the square became the customs hub for Montreal with the construction of the Customs House, then known as la Douane. At this time the square became known as the Place du

² Pinard A8.

³ Luc Noppen, *Place Royale, Montréal: synthèse de l'histoire de la forme urbaine* (Montreal: Ville de Montreal Service des parcs, jardins et espaces verts, 1999).

⁴ This artwork can be found in the collection of the Chateau Ramezay in Montreal.

⁵ Pinard A8.

Vieux Marché after the city had outgrown the space and opened new markets at Place Jacques Cartier and Marché Bonsecours. It was also referred to as the Place de la Douane, and with an urban population over 25,000, the square became the principal place of commerce and business in a booming metropolis, as all shipping from the harbour came through this institution.⁶ After 1870 the Royal Insurance Company building became the new customs building on the current site of the Pointe-à-Callière. Other government offices would go on to use the Old Customs House, which became known as l'Ancienne Douane, for decades.

The Customs House still stands in the centre of the square today, as it was preserved as part of the Pointe-à-Callière site design. In 1836 British architect John Ostell designed the building in a neoclassical style reminiscent of the villas of the Italian Renaissance (Fig. 1). Ostell was an influential architect in Montreal at the time. His designs include the McGill College Building, built in a similar style between 1839 and 1843.⁷ The Customs House has two façades: one that faces rue St. Paul, the other, the harbour. Both façades feature a central pediment supported by pilasters, while a portico above the port side doors is supported by Tuscan columns (Fig. 2-3). During this period the once open square became a Victorian park enclosed by a low iron fence with a fountain in the centre of the space (Fig. 4). Its location and commanding architectural style highlighted the prestige and importance of Montreal as a city of commerce, and emphasized the central role of this building to all those who came to Montreal by way of the port (Vieux Montreal).

⁶ Edgard Andrew Collard, "More About Place Royale," *The Gazette* [Montreal] (11 Sept. 1982): n.pag.

⁷ "Molson Hall, Arts Building and Moyse Hall, and Dawson Hall," *Virtual McGill: Campuses and Buildings* (Canadian Architecture Collection of the McGill Archives, 2001). Web. 29 Sept. 2009.

Much of this well-documented history has been retold in publications about Place Royale, and has been preserved and incorporated into the design of the Pointe-à-Callière museum. Funded by municipal, provincial and federal levels of government, the institution was created in 1992 to mark the much-anticipated 350th anniversary of Montreal. Only a few years earlier, during archaeological excavations of Place Royale in the 1980s, thousands of artefacts had been uncovered along with the ruins of centuries-old buildings that once stood on and around the square. It became the task for architect Dan Hanganu and two other architectural firms to collaborate on the creation of a space that would showcase the preservation of history, the archaeological ruins, and the artefacts of the Place Royale site, including the Customs House building.

The main building of the Pointe-à-Callière Museum, known as the Eperon, has become an award winning architectural design. Dan Hanganu attempted to echo the silhouette of the former Royal Insurance building that caught fire in 1947 and was demolished a few years later (Fig. 5-6). He incorporated the clock tower, the grey stone, and the shape and proportions of the former building without being nostalgic.⁸ It was embraced with excitement in most media coverage, and awards included Sauvons Montreal's Prix Orange in recognition of "une architecture novatrice et l'attention portée au lien entre l'ancien et le nouveau."⁹ However, despite these accolades, the design also met some resistance from local residents who felt it

⁸ Francois Magendie, ed., *Pointe-à-Callière muse d'archéologie d'histoire de Montréal* (Montreal: Editions Section B Inc., 1994) 32.

⁹ Jean-Paul Soulie, "Prix Orange: edifice IBM; le prix Citron au 1000 de la Gauchetière," *La Presse [Montreal]* (19 Dec. 1992): A3. "An innovative architectural design bringing attention to the link between the old and the new." Trans. Jessa Alston-O'Connor.

should have been created in an older architectural style that fit in better with Old Montreal.¹⁰ The architectural concept of the museum extended to the new design of the square itself.

The attempt to combine the present and the past led to significant alterations to Place Royale. The subsequent design included the construction of a five-foot high, rectangular, granite platform that covers much of the square between the Ancienne Douane building and rue de la Commune (Fig. 7). It loosely echoes the fenced and landscaped Victorian park that had once encompassed that space in the late 1880s.¹¹ The dais serves as a lid over the crypt below the surface of the square where architectural ruins of the past are now key features of the museum's underground exhibits. A narrow strip of glass along the top of the platform was incorporated with the intention of revealing the ruins below. The visual dominance of this platform in the centre of the flat open square dictates a hierarchy of value and importance through architecture. These architectural designs preserve those histories that left archaeological traces and do not incorporate other more ephemeral histories that left no physical traces behind.

Sections of the platform's surface were used to commemorate the history and commercial progress of Montreal and include a fountain of thirty-five vertical pipes. One engraving includes a quotation from 1672 made by a Sulpician Father (Fig. 8). It reads:

Si nous regardons la commodité de commerce, comme ce lieu est le plus avancé
où les barques puissent montrer il n'y a pas de doute que ce lieu ne soit un des
meilleurs du pays pour accommoder les habitants par le moyen des négoce qu'ils

¹⁰ Jean-Pierre Bonhomme, "La Nouvelle Place Royale, une solide insertion moderne," *La Presse* [Montreal] (1 July 1990): B8.

¹¹ Marc Bourdeau, ed., *Pointe-à-Callière: Experience the Past* (Montreal: Pointe-à-Callière, 1992) 11.

y peuvent faire avec les sauvages qui y descendent en canots de toutes les nations supérieures.¹²

A second quotation from 1882 (Fig. 9) reads:

There is no more beautiful city on the continent of America than the commercial metropolis of the Dominion of Canada. Lying between the river and the Mount Royal, rarely has it been the good fortune of any city to have so fine a background. The flat part, situated at the base by the riverside, makes it easy for business.¹³

A third set of engravings commemorates The Great Peace between France and Aboriginal nations of the region in 1701. Reproductions of the animal images signed by the chiefs as part of the peace agreement have been engraved into the platform (Fig. 10). Together, these engravings and the fountain attempt to celebrate and affirm the settlement of Montreal and its achievements and successes as a city over the centuries. The architects felt that the contemporary multipurpose structure was in keeping with the spirit of the public square, celebrating both the past and the present.¹⁴

However, the consequence of this site design is a public site that is not conceptually or physically accessible to all. It does not reflect the diverse histories and experiences of this site. By preserving the archaeological ruins under granite, public access is limited in several ways. At approximately five-feet in height and accessible only by stairs, the platform has rendered the square difficult for public passage and everyday use. During my observations in August and

¹² Francois Dollier de Casson, supérieur des Sulpiciens, 1672: "If we look at the convenience of trade, this area is the most advanced where ships demonstrate that there is no doubt about the fact that this location is one of the best in the land to accommodate residents through trade with the savages that come by canoe from nations upstream." Trans. Jessa Alston-O'Connor.

¹³ Reverend A.J. Bray and John Lesperance M.R. Sc., 1882.

¹⁴ Bourdeau 11.

September 2009, many people walked around the platform or sat on the stairs encircling its perimeters rather than walk over the top as they might have crossed a flat square. The narrow glass windows along the top of the dais, which were intended to reveal the ruins below, appeared dark and opaque. Unless one already knows the features of the museum, there is no clear indication outdoors that these ruins exist beneath the platform. Therefore, the ruins cannot be seen by the public unless one pays a museum visitor's entrance fee. Overall, public engagement and connection to the physical structure and the historical significance of the history beneath it are restricted.

In the design concept of Place Royale, the historical references are unclear to the viewer. The two commemorative texts are not bilingual, nor is any historical context given. The French quotation by a Sulpician hails the greatness of this region for commerce and negotiations with "savages." The English text praises the commercial potential of Montreal in the 1880s. There is no clear connection between either of the quotations and the site. The thirty-five pipes that make up the fountain do not clearly point to the fact that they are intended to symbolize the 350th anniversary of the city.¹⁵ These aspects of the site compromise the commemorative intent of the design. To fully understand the significance of the dais and site design, one must already be literate in the history of Montreal and the creative vision of the museum designers.

In my interview on November 25th, 2009 with Dinu Bumbaru, the Policy Director at Heritage Montreal, he explained that the organization was fundamentally in support of the Pointe-à-Callière project but had concerns. Although they had been a part of the jury that selected the architect teams for the design, they also expressed concerns about the redesign of the

¹⁵ Dinu Bumbaru, interview with the author, 25 Nov. 2009.

square. They felt that the raised platform transformed the square into a modern plaza. Today it has become an alien, inhospitable space for the public.¹⁶ They had tried to suggest a smaller raised area in order to preserve the ruins below without sacrificing the entire square. However, any suggestions to change the design, even for functional reasons, were met with firm resistance by the architects.¹⁷ Heritage Montreal felt that this design would destroy the spirit of a truly public space, and would become a pedestal or a plinth that does not function as a welcoming public site. He went on to explain that the organization was also concerned about “migrating monuments” that had been removed from the square and placed elsewhere in Old Montreal rather than included in the new design. These included a sculpture of a prominent businessman named John Young and an obelisk commemorating the first French settlers of Montreal. Overall, Heritage Montreal acknowledges that, while it is challenging to build upon a site rich in history, the design has rendered the square a static environment and does not clearly explain the historical events it is intended to commemorate.¹⁸

A photograph from July 2009 by Montreal's francophone branch of Amnesty International supports several of the concerns expressed by Heritage Montreal (Fig. 11). In contrast to early images like the sketches of James Cockburn, this image is not a picturesque scene of the site. The photograph was taken to document a demonstration against state executions. This site was chosen for the re-enactment of an execution by lethal injection. In the background, the Customs House and the granite platform collide visually in the new design of the square. No visual cues remain of the market history, nor are there any traces of the Victorian

¹⁶ Bumbaru.

¹⁷ Bumbaru.

¹⁸ Bumbaru.

park greenery that once stood before the Customs House. Only the dominating empty expanse of the new platform design is evident.

Consistent with Heritage Montreal's predictions of the decline in public use of this new space, Amnesty International chose to carry out their demonstration at street level rather than stage their event on the raised platform of the square. They selected Place Royale so that their demonstration might be visible to passersby, but chose to use the space beside the structure rather than on top of it.¹⁹ Here, even a group seeking public attention for their cause did not seem to feel that the raised dais was inviting or desirable. When I spoke with Charles Perroud, activism co-ordinator for Amnesty International, about the historical significance of their public performance against execution, they had not known about the history of executions that had once taken place at the site.²⁰ This knowledge-gap further demonstrates the impact that selective preservation of the past has on the public who utilises this space, and the incomplete public history that the omission of difficult histories perpetuates.

The reasoning behind these selective representations of history at Place Royale may be explained through John Urry and Alan Gordon's discussion of the *tourist gaze*. Public gazes have always been of importance throughout the history of Place Royale. The public gaze was critical when it was the site of public executions in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. When the square was altered and opened up to the waterfront in the nineteenth century, the gaze of ship passengers was thus directed to this square as a means of emphasizing the city's commercial hub

¹⁹ Charles Perroud, "Les photos du manifestant contre la 1000e execution, juillet 09." Electronic message to Jessa Alston-O'Connor, 24 Nov. 2009.

²⁰ Perroud.

with the Customs House placed prominently at its centre. In some ways, the tourist gaze today may be read as supplanting these public gazes from the past.

The museum project was actualized to celebrate the patriotic heritage of the Montreal: it is intended as a tourist attraction to showcase the past of this city. In their promotional material for their Grand Opening in 1992, Director Francine Lelièvre explained that the visitor is “at the very heart of the Pointe-à-Callière, everything is centered on the visitor.”²¹ In his book *The Tourist Gaze*, John Urry points out that “a critical look at tourism can reveal aspects of normal practices which might otherwise remain opaque.”²² In other words, by considering tourist attractions, elements of the wider society may be revealed. This is especially evident when considering how historical interpretations and values are constructed as valid or normal for the visitor, or how a limited historical narrative may be legitimized as fact in a museum setting. Alan Gordon’s discussion of this gaze brings up an important explanation for the simplified history that is spatially embodied at Place Royale and the museum. He suggests that, in relation to the tourist gaze,

state and private initiatives attempt to construct experience and, in the case of public memory, to shape the way visitors view the local past. It leads public historians to anticipate the gaze of outsiders ... anticipation of the attention of tourists produces a simplified depiction of the local past.²³

²¹ Francois Magendie, ed., *Pointe-à-Callière musée d'archéologie d'histoire de Montréal* (Montreal: Editions Section B Inc., 1994) 28.

²² John Urry, *The Tourist Gaze* (London: SAGE Publications Ltd., 1990) 2.

²³ Alan Gordon, “Exploring the Boundaries of Public Memory,” *Making Public Pasts: The Contested Terrain of Montreal's Public Memories, 1891-1930* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's UP, 2001) 12.

This simplification and selective chronicling of history for the tourist is evident in the design of the site, in the narrative of the museum, in the content of its public programs, and in the histories that are consequently absent from the square today.

As a critical counterpoint to the selective history that is memorialized at Place Royale today, it is important to consider how some groups and visitors have very different historical and thus spatial relationships to this site due to the centuries of oppression and violence that occurred on and around this square. As the principle public gathering place in Montreal in the eighteenth century, Place Royale was also the site of public torture and executions of black and Aboriginal slaves and of accused and convicted criminals in New France. This is not the well-known history of Canada, and it is not part of the museum narrative that focuses primarily on the white French and English histories of Place Royale.

Judicial punishments were publicly carried out at Place Royale as a way to intimidate, to instil fear among the city's citizens, to warn against criminal behaviour, or to gain a confession from the accused.²⁴ Montreal was the crime capital of Quebec. Sixty-four percent of crimes in New France took place in this city²⁵ and its legal system was based on the model in France, but without lawyers due to their poor reputation in France. The accused was presumed guilty until proven innocent. Crimes that could lead to torture or the death penalty included theft, counterfeiting, prostitution, desecration, concealment of pregnancy, slander, arson, cause of bodily harm, adultery by women, rape or murder.²⁶

²⁴ Musée du Château Ramezay, *Crime and Punishment: Justice in New France*, exhibition didactic panels (Montreal: Musée du Château Ramezay, 2006).

²⁵ Musée du Château Ramezay.

²⁶ Musée du Château Ramezay.

In the early eighteenth century, there was often one execution a year and two or three incidents of public torture.²⁷ Drawing from European methods, torture included the wearing of a heavy iron collar, flogging, the stalks, 'the wooden horse,' and branding of a *fleur de lys* symbol.²⁸ Public executions included burning, but they were most often done through public hangings in the square.²⁹ Thus, this social history of Place Royale as a site of violence and public justice and injustice marked public relationships to the square. However, those histories are rarely communicated to the public today and are not part of the spatial design today. There are very few physical reminders of these events currently in existence and none at the site or in the museum today. One isolated marker outside the Grey Nun Motherhouse stands as a rare reminder of an execution that took place at Place Royale.

In May 1752, a Frenchman named Jean Baptiste Goyer dit Belisle killed and robbed Jean Favre and Anne Bastien Farly who lived near what is the corner of Guy Street and René Levesque Boulevard today. He was arrested, tortured into confession, and gruesomely executed on 'the wheel' on Place Royale.³⁰ He was buried where he had committed the crimes, and a red cross was erected there as a warning to others. The cross still stood when the Grey Nuns acquired the land to build their Motherhouse in 1869, and in 1940 the original cross was replaced with the current one. In 2002 a plaque was placed to commemorate the victims, but no mention is made of Belisle or the crime (Fig. 12-13). This cross bears witness as a singular physical marker to the

²⁷ André Lachance, *La Vie Urbaine en Nouvelle France* (Montreal: Editions du Boréal Express, 1987) 28.

²⁸ Raymond Boyer, *Les Crimes et les Chatiments au Canada Francais du XII au XX Siecles* (Montreal: le Cercle du Livre de France, 1966) 164.

²⁹ Musée du Chateau Ramezay.

³⁰ Edgard Andrew Collard, "History in Place Royale," *The Gazette [Montreal]* (4 Sept. 1982): n.pag. "June 7 at la Place du Marche, he was tied down, then had the joints and bones of his arms, lower legs, and thighs crushed by the executioner with a metal rod. His torso was struck to rupture internal organs, then the broken man was bent and tied to a wheel in the air, and left to the elements until he died."

criminal executions that happened at Place Royale, but as it is located far from the square and the historical details of the event are not included with it, even this lone cross does not effectively contribute to a societal understanding of the history of public justice in Montreal.

The design of Place Royale today overlooks the spatial relationship that some communities have with this site, relationships that have been shaped by slavery and oppression. The history of black and Aboriginal slavery in Montreal and across New France is another uncomfortable history that the design of Place Royale and the narrative of the Pointe-à-Callière Museum continue to omit from public memory and discussion of the square. From the mid-1600s until the beginning of the nineteenth century, over 4200 slaves were imported and sold in Quebec, primarily as domestic servants and labourers. In 1709, it was officially declared that “all Panis and Negros that had been or will be purchased belong entirely as property to those that bought them, as their slaves.”³¹ The practice had been in place for several decades but this declaration marked the official beginning of slavery in Quebec. In New France, there was not the agricultural need for slaves to work plantation fields. Instead, the ownership of slaves became a desirable symbol of social status for the bourgeois, civil officials, merchants, and even members of the Church during this period.³² In Quebec, seventy-seven percent of slaves lived in urban centers, and over half of those lived in Montreal and its surrounding region.³³ Open slave markets were not common, but in 1785 two public slave auctions were in fact held on Place Royale.³⁴ No traces of these histories are apparent in the site design today.

³¹ Lachance 66.

³² Lachance 66.

³³ Dorothy Williams, *Les Noirs à Montréal 1628-1986: essai de démographie urbaine* (Montreal: VLB Editeur, 1998) 24.

³⁴ Marcel Trudel, *L'esclavage au Canada: Histoire et Conditions de l'Esclavage* (Québec: Les Presses Universitaires Laval, 1960) 108.

While the museum features some history of trade among the French and Aboriginal nations in the area, it omits one of the most oppressive of colonial practices in New France: centuries of enslavement of Aboriginal people by the French and the English. Known as *panis*, Aboriginal slaves made up the majority of slaves in Quebec until the practice ended in the early 1800s. The majority of Aboriginal slaves were Pawnee, a nation from Missouri that was often sold or traded among other Aboriginal nations before arriving in Montreal, but slaves came from other nations, as well. Many of them were children.³⁵ Of the 4200 people enslaved here, over 2700 of them were Aboriginal.³⁶ If Place Royale is to truly reflect collective history, and if the origins of Montreal are to be fully understood, then even the difficult history of racially based oppression and exploitation needs to be acknowledged and addressed. However, it remains absent.

Considering this history of enslavement related to this site, the limited and selective Aboriginal history in the design of the Place Royale site and in the museum displays is problematic. Permanent exhibits offer information about Aboriginal settlements in the area before Montreal was founded. They also cover the years of conflict between Aboriginal groups and the French, and they discuss the fur trade and religious missions of the Church. Through this sanitized narrative, the exploitive history of Aboriginal slaves remains hidden from the visitor's experience of Place Royale.

The engraving on the crypt platform on the square itself that marks the Great Peace of 1701 is a key example of this. While it commemorates an important agreement for Aboriginal

³⁵ Trudel (1960) 15.

³⁶ Trudel (1960) 23. Marcel Trudel, *Deux siècles d'esclavage au Québec*, new ed. (Montreal: Editions Hurtubise HMH Ltee., 2004) 73.

and French relations in the history of Montreal, the marker implies that peace was to follow from that point on. This fails to address the colonial oppression that would continue through the practice of slavery during the following century. In celebrating peace while ignoring the continued practice of slavery, the consequence of the site's architectural design is an effective rewriting and re-visioning of the colonial history of Place Royale with no indication for the public today that historical injustices have been suppressed.

Both black and Aboriginal slaves used the markets at Place Royale, and they were also victims of the incidents of torture and public executions that occurred there. In 1756 an Aboriginal slave named Marianne was charged with stealing from her owner, Officer Alexander Dagneu Douville. She was sentenced to hang but claimed she was pregnant. When her claim was dismissed, she was executed.³⁷ In 1734, a fire destroyed forty-six buildings, almost half of the city at that time. Marie Josephe Angelique, a black slave, was accused of setting the fire in her owner's home on St. Paul Street close to Place Royale. Trial papers document that no witnesses definitively saw her do it although they believed rumours that she had. Her fate was sealed by a four-year-old who said she saw Angelique take burning coals upstairs.³⁸

Angelique's six-week trial and sentence are well documented. She was tortured with 'la question extraordinaire.'³⁹ When she finally did admit to the crime under torture, she was sentenced to have her hand cut off and to then be burned alive.⁴⁰ An appeal led to a reduced

³⁷ Raymond Boyer, *Les Crimes et les Chatiments au Canada Francais du XII au XX Siecles* (Montreal: le Cercle du Livre de France, 1966) 134.

³⁸ Centre d'Histoire de Montréal, *Qui a mis le feu a Montréal en 1734?*, exhibition didactic panels (Montreal: Centre d'Histoire de Montreal, 2006).

³⁹ This was a method of torture in which wooden stakes were strapped to the legs, and wedges were driven down between the leg and stake in order to compel the accused to confess.

⁴⁰ Musée du Chateau Ramezay.

sentence: hanging, then the burning of her body. Executions like this would have taken place on the Place Royale, but in this case it was decided to carry out this sentence further down St. Paul Street near the houses that had been destroyed. This is a noteworthy incident in the history of racial oppression and slavery in Montreal. It took place in and around the square, but is not validated or commemorated in the design of the site or permanent museum exhibits.

In contrast to the spatial design and preferred narratives of Place Royale and the Pointe-à-Callière Museum, these difficult histories have not been forgotten by other museums in Old Montreal. In 2006 and 2007, the Chateau Ramezay museum presented an exhibit entitled *Crimes and Punishment: Justice in New France* that included information on the legal system, torture, and executions during this era, including the story of Angelique. The story of Angelique is one of the only accounts of slavery in Quebec that has attracted attention from authors and museum curators. From October, 2006 until January, 2007, the Centre d'Histoire de Montreal presented an exhibit entitled *Qui a mis le feu a Montreal en 1734?*⁴¹ The exhibit was interactive, allowing visitors to learn about the lack of evidence and eyewitnesses during Angelique's trial. It raised questions about other possible neighbours who may have had a motive to set the fire. As Director of Communications André Gaveau explains,

Beaucoup de gens ont fait des romans, des essais et des pièces de théâtre sur le sujet et se sont forgé des opinions différentes sur Angelique[...] Certains la voient comme un héroïne, d'autres comme une pauvre esclave noire qui était au mauvais

⁴¹ "Who set fire to Montreal in 1734?" Trans. Jessa Alston-O'Connor.

endroit au mauvais moment. Nous, nous supposons que le visiteur est intelligent et souhaitons qu'il se fasse sa propre idée sur le coupable de ce crime.⁴²

The media responded favourably to these museum exhibits, declaring the exhibit at the Centre d'Histoire de Montreal "ambitieux ... Le visiteur ne repartira pas tranquille."⁴³ Aside from these critical temporary exhibits, discussions of public justice in New France and the practice of slavery in Montreal are still absent from the permanent exhibits of these museums, just as they continue to be omitted from those at the Pointe-à-Callière Museum and the site of Place Royale.

The omission or censorship of information for visitors to this square in Old Montreal can be seen throughout the architectural and spatial designs of Pointe-à-Callière and Place Royale, and also in some of the museum's animation of the historical square through its public programming. An example of Alan Gordon's concern with "simplified history"⁴⁴ is especially evident in the museum's annual public market held one weekend every August. The Marché Publique is intended to recreate a destination where "the ambience of a public market from 1749 is reproduced for over 70,000 visitors."⁴⁵ Slavery is not a visible part of the market, and a wooden set of stalks is the only symbol of public justice incorporated in the event. In an interview with museum employee Francine Labrosse, she explained that they have occasionally tried to incorporate actors as slaves into their market in the past, but visitors are so accustomed to

⁴² Lisa-Marie Gervais, "Pleins Feux sur la Nouvelle-France," *Le Devoir [Montreal]* (27 Oct. 2006): B1. "Many have written novels, essays and plays on this topic and have formed different opinions about Angelique [...] Some see her as a heroine, others as an unfortunate slave who was in the wrong place at the wrong time. We are presuming the gallery visitor is intelligent and hope that they may form their own opinion on who was guilty of this crime." Trans. Jessa Alston-O'Connor.

⁴³ Gervais B1. "Ambitious...visitors will not leave the exhibit unaffected." Trans. Jessa Alston-O'Connor.

⁴⁴ Gordon 12.

⁴⁵ Francine Labrosse, interview with the author, 27 Nov. 2009.

multicultural communities in Montreal that they did not realize the intended message. As a result, Labrosse explained that the museum concluded that this increasingly popular event is better suited to creating an “ambience” of a time and not a suitable place to teach about difficult history.⁴⁶

She also went on to explain that the museum is “not there yet” in terms of discussing the history of Aboriginal slaves in Montreal. The museum has spent the past twenty years building meaningful bridges between local Aboriginal communities and the museum’s exhibits and programming, but they have not yet found an appropriate way to discuss this difficult history.⁴⁷ This compliance with the selective retelling of history does not offer the visitor to the Square the full picture of the foundations of this city, and perpetuates a fictionalized view of colonial history in Montreal. Public programs and animation of this site can serve as valuable means to readdress social histories that have been overlooked by the architectural design of the space. The absence of discussion or memorials for the difficult histories that shaped people’s spatial relationships with Place Royale in favour of a selective presentation of the site today favours the histories of some, while silencing others. The square and its environs are not fully represented by the architectural design and the museum that was created and mandated to tell the stories of Montreal.

In conclusion, the site of Place Royale today, and its mediation by the Pointe-à-Callière Museum, has become a space that perpetuates a form of historic amnesia among visitors to the square and reaffirms a sanitized national narrative that is incomplete at best. The spatial design of Place Royale today heavily reflects the interests of the Pointe-à-Callière Museum institution at

⁴⁶ Labrosse.

⁴⁷ Labrosse.

the expense of a more complete (and much more sobering) understanding of the origins of Montreal, and thus the difficult spatial relationships that these histories create for some visitors and communities even today. At first glance, it appears that the ruins that lie beneath the square were the determining factor for the architectural form of the square's design. Ironically, the underbelly of the square is actually the torture, colonial oppression and slavery that it once hosted and can neither embrace nor apologise for. These truths are merely overlooked on the way to the crypt. While painful to acknowledge, the colonial histories and realities of oppression are foundational layers of Place Royale and of public relationships to the space. Without these histories, the picture of the past remains incomplete and narrowly understood as an idyllic site of pride, cherished heritage, and collective history.

Figures

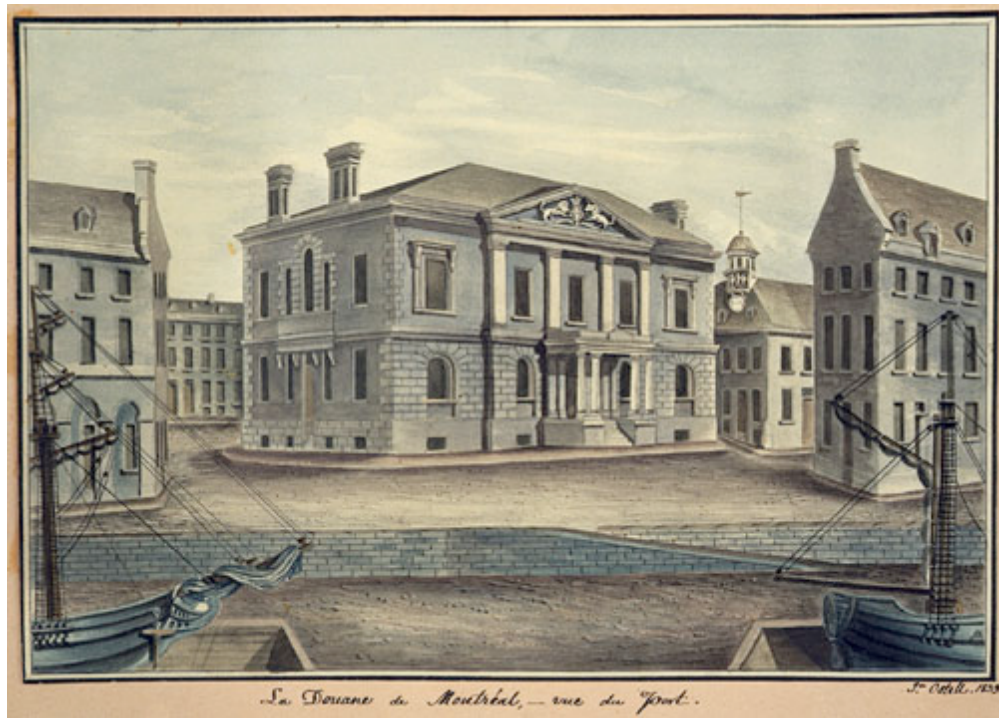


Fig. 1 John Ostell, *La Douane de Montréal, vue du port*, 1839. Watercolour from Jacques Viger's album *Souvenirs canadiens*. Source: Bibliothèque et Archives Nationale du Québec.

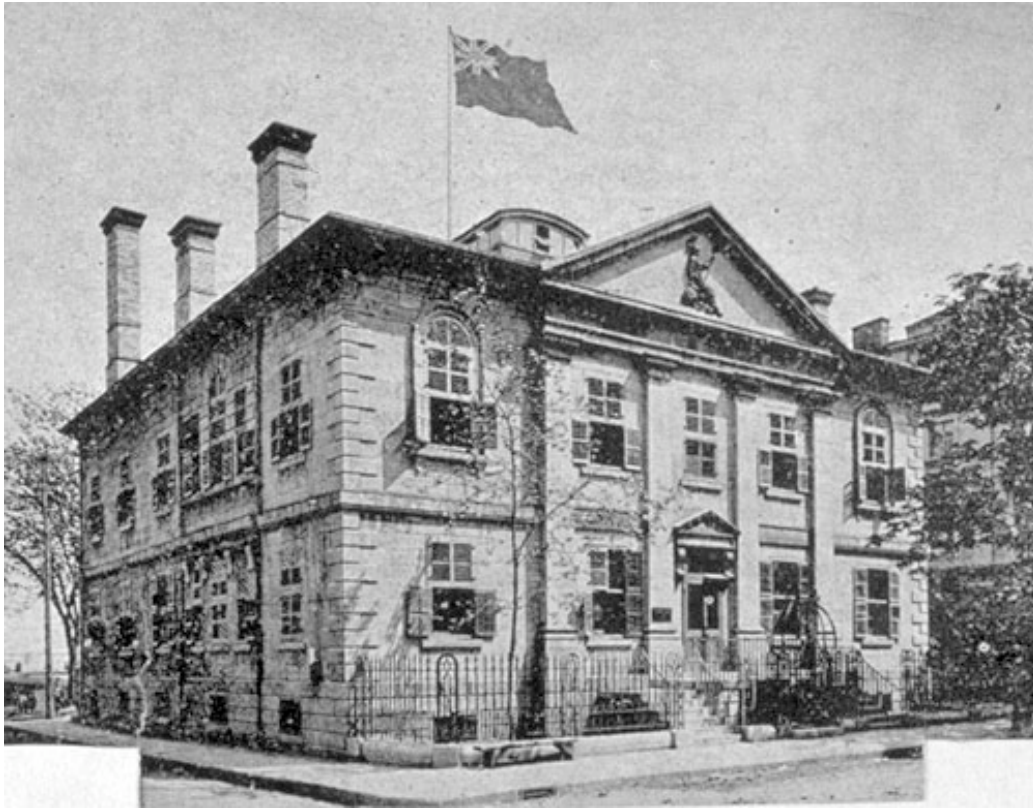


Fig. 2 Anonymous, *Façade de l'édifice d'Inland Revenue*, 1891. Collection Édouard-Zotique Massicotte (P750-7-109-f). Source: Bibliothèque et Archives Nationales du Québec.



Fig. 3 William Notman, *Custom House and Place Royal, Montreal, QC*, 1859. Source: McCord Museum, Montreal (N-0000.193.70.1).



Fig. 4 Anonymous, Montreal House at Custom House Square, Montreal, QC, c. 1880. McCord Museum, Montreal (MP-0000.227).



Fig. 5 The Eperon, Oct. 2009.
Photograph: Jessa Alston-O'Connor.



Fig. 6 William Notman, *Royal Insurance building, Montreal, QC, 1866.*
Source: McCord Museum, Montreal (I-20720.1).



Fig. 7 Place Royale, July 2010. Photograph: Jessa Alston-O'Connor.



Fig. 8 Place Royale platform, engraving of quotation from 1642, Nov. 2009. Photograph: Jessa Alston-O'Connor.



Fig. 9 Place Royale platform, engraving of quotation from 1882, Nov. 2009. Photograph: Jessa Alston-O'Connor.



Fig. 10 Place Royale platform, engraving of the Great Peace agreement, Nov. 2009.
Photograph: Jessa Alston-O'Connor.



Fig. 11 Demonstration by Amnistie Internationale Canada Francophone against state executions, 12 July 2009. Photograph: Amnistie Internationale Canada Francophone, Montreal.



Fig.12 Anonymous, *Untitled* [the original red cross in front of the Grey Nun Mother House], c. 1940. Source: Soeurs Grises de Montréal (L082-Croix rouge 1).



Fig. 13 Anonymous, *Untitled* [the red cross and plaque, today], n.d.
Source: Soeurs Grises de Montréal (L082-Croix rouge 2).

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