

Bank Street College of Education

Educate

2000

The Long Trip at Bank Street

2000

Long Trip 2000 Saint Helena Island Reflections

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Connections

Every shuteye aint sleeping every good bye aint gone." (A Gullah saying)

The third (revised) Bank Street long Trip went to Penn Center on St. Helena Island, South Carolina at the end of April, 2000.

We were a group of twenty spirited alums, faculty of the graduate school and school for children, and friends of the college taking a journey together.

Our lives were touched in many ways, our thinking changed forever. We became a group of caring supportive people within ourselves, and our group grew in numbers and in depth with each new days experience and meeting such extraordinary dedicated people.

We cruised the Savannah river on The Savannah River Queen, an updated paddle-wheel boat, hearing gospel music as we dined. We saw low-country basket weaving and tried it ourselves, we heard about and saw what it takes to produce indigo throws and garments. We revelled in stories and tales from "Aunt Perlie Sue", who steeped us in Gullah culture with a light and humorous touch. We met her again, in different garb, as a school principal at one of the island schools. We were heartedly welcomed at three elementary schools, and of these felt

Totally at home at The Humanities school - a very Bank Street approach. The school was filled with excited and engaged hands-on learners who produced memorable, large portraits of well known Americans.

We were greeted at Armstrong Atlantic State University by a group of ~~their~~ professors from AASU and Savannah State University. We learned, among other things, about their involvement in The Pathways to Teaching program and their tremendous successes in launching young black men into the teaching profession.

We had evening discussions led by two of our own; Sal Vascelaro of the graduate school faculty and Joan Windsor Blos, who formerly taught at the graduate school. Sal, whose doctorate thesis was on the original Long Trip, spoke about its origin and history, but most importantly on the impact the trips had on the lives of the participants. He told of their expanded circle of empathy and their deeper insight into the power of learning through experience. Many of the students questioned their own belief systems and made connections they had never made before.

Joan, an author of many books for children, ~~was~~ ^{and} also the recipient of The Newberry

award for The Gathering of Days, presented us with a piece of history about Penn Center's beginnings with the Grimké sisters, two Quaker ladies who devoted their lives to educating the freed slaves as part of the Port Royal experiment, which began in 1862. She also told us about Charlotte Forten, a young African American woman from a wealthy Philadelphia family, who joined the Grimké sisters for a year, but was forced to return north because of her own poor health.

We visited both Charleston and Savannah, taking a Negro Heritage tour, seeing a pictorial panorama of the early life of African Americans. We visited the Avery Research Center and the Civil Rights Museum and had the privilege of meeting W.W. Law an important and passionate figure in the Civil rights movement.

We went to Drayton Hall Plantation, and were awe struck by the magnificence of the architecture of the grand house. And then we envisioned the tragedies held within the lives of the slaves who built and cared for all this opulence. We saw the narrow winding stairs which they had to navigate at night, with a food tray in one hand and a candle in the other — and were sickenred. We were moved to tears to read facsimilies of

the plantation owners worldly goods and saw the monetary value placed upon their slaves. We were hushed with ^{the} horror of our own past. Throughout our weeks at Penn Center we met with Emory Campbell, the Charismatic Director who received an honorary degree from Bank Street in May 2000, and Veronica Gerald, the Director of History and culture. We came to understand the travails the African American People endured, and also how they persisted to forge a life for themselves and preserve their Gullah Culture and language.

This inland island, with 30 plantations, was abandoned in the 1860's because of the extreme heat and the presence of malaria. Former slaves bought land and had to prove that they could plant and harvest crops for two years before they were issued a deed. The Port Royal Experiment was about more than just answering the question could African Americans become educated! It was also about would former slaves fight for their right to become land owners. and thus preserve their culture and their home. Amidst all this depth of learning there was Real Southern Cooking: Grits ~~and~~ Collards, Yams and Okra that was out of this world! Biscuits and honey barbeque chicken and pork and

All the trimmings — but the very best was a low country boil of hard shell crab, shrimp, sausage, corn and potatoes. made on an outside grill and eaten at a picnic table covered with newspaper. This was the ultimate in Southern hospitality.

We fell in love with the land itself — the stately live oaks dripping with Spanish moss, the marshes which seemed to stretch out forever and the soft quiet which settled over the landscape.

So..... We packed all of this in in just one week. We ended up at Sunday morning services at the Brick Baptist Church with a beautiful and meaningful Gospel Choir to send us on our way. We were all different for the experience, more thoughtful of and about others, more knowledgeable about who we really are — more respectful of differences, more in touch with the similarities of the human spirit.

"Every shut eye aint sleeping every goodbye aint gone."

Carol B. Hillman