

Liberation through highlighting racial and ethnic difference: The formation and impact of the Law 70 for African Descendants in Colombia

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With gratitude to the Allen Wells Travel and Research Grant, I returned to Colombia for two weeks to enhance my research on Law of 70 in Colombia for my Africana Studies honors project. Throughout the first semester, I primarily incorporated ethnographic research about San Cipriano, a collective territory protected under Law 70. I visited San Cipriano during my study abroad experience in Spring 2022, and I included personal accounts as well as researched information to attract the reader to an example of the type of environment Law 70 protects. Subsequently, I analyzed Law 70 itself. I examined specific sections of the Law and explored in detail the chapters of the Law. I also include information about the Constitution of 1991 from which the Transitory Article 55 was established that led to the creation of Law 70 while exploring the impact of ethnic and territorial distinctions in Colombia.

During my return to Colombia, I primarily spent time in two different cities - Cali and Bogotá. In Cali, I researched in the Centro Cultural de Cali. I spent most of my time in the historical archives. The goal for the second part of my project includes a historical analysis of what led to Law 70. Since the Law focuses on Black people in certain rural regions in Colombia, I worked to obtain a stronger understanding of Colombia's history regarding enslavement and emancipation in Colombia. Therefore, I spent time retrieving and reading through enslavers accounts about their plantations in different areas, particularly in Cali. I read censuses from the 18th century that showed the distinction of free and enslaved Black Colombians. Learning more information and data during the period of enslavement helps shed light on the character of Colombia that contributed to the history that led to Law 70.

I met with a few prominent researchers in Colombia who have great expertise in Black social movements, ethnic studies, environmental studies, territorialities, and conflicts in Colombia. During my last week, in Bogotá, one provided insightful information about how I could utilize some of the research resources in Bogotá like the CINEP which is the center of investigation and education for peace. Additionally, I lived close to the Center of Remembrance, Peace, and Reconciliation which is an incredible cultural center that is dedicated to the acknowledgement of victims in the armed conflict.

I mostly researched at the Biblioteca Nacional (National Library) and the Luis Ángel Arrango library. Thankfully, I had access to read and collect data that pertain specifically to my research on Law 70. It was incredible to explore these vast research centers in person. It was a little overwhelming to see all of the documents and books available regarding Law 70. I also conversed with some Afro-Colombians. These discussions shed light on the contemporary culture of Colombia through their lens. They allowed me to better understand the exposure that Colombians have to Law 70, its history, and its significance, while also gauging their perspectives of racism in Colombia.

My last day in Bogotá, I spent time at the National Museum. I learned a lot from the various exhibits. The exhibit regarding "Memorias and Nación" (Memories and Nation) included valuable information about the Constitution of 1991. It also referenced slavery and the essential role of Afro and indigenous people in cultivation of many territories in Colombia. Furthermore, I went to "Secretos del Mar," which is an Afro-Colombian restaurant. This restaurant holds historical significance because I learned that during the time of the meetings for the National Constitutional Assembly in the 1990s, regarding the foundation of the Constitution of 1991 which led to Law 70, Black leaders met here and held some of their meetings. The restaurant was heavily decorated with posters and artwork including Black activists.

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