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‘Dysfunctional’ court plagued by case delays

Murder hearings, trial dates collapse for preventable reasons

BY JILLIAN KRAMER | Staff writer

The murder case of Widner DeGruy was already three years old when his defense attorney asked to reschedule a hearing so he could escort his wife to a Mardi Gras ball.
The judge granted the request.

LONGING FOR JUSTICE

Part two of a series

That delay in 2018 was one of many that stalled the case over 10 years, as court records show the judge agreed to attorneys’ requests to postpone hearings and trials

for a dentist appointment, an opportunity to speak at a conference and to prioritize other cases.

DeGruy’s still unresolved case stretches across a decade in which homicide prosecutions in New Orleans took longer to close than almost anywhere else in the country, an analysis by The Times-

Picayune found. The system’s slow pace leaves victims’ families and defendants waiting for justice, trapped in a debilitating limbo, and shackles taxpayers with mounting expenses.

Some delays are unavoidable. But inside Orleans Parish Criminal District Court, hearings and trial dates routinely collapse for preventable reasons: lawyers

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‘THIS ISN’T BUSINESS AS USUAL’



STAFF PHOTOS BY SOPHIA GERMER

Rolanda Teal, an anthropology professor, walks past signs for the Magnolia Plantation at Cane River Creole National Historical Park in Derry on Aug. 20.

Louisiana national park tells a story of slavery that some fear will be erased

BY JENNA ROSS | Staff writer

DERRY — Rolanda Teal strode onto the old plantation at Cane River Creole National Historical Park, blowing past a map. The anthropology professor knows this park and its stories. As a student, she helped tell them.

Teal once sifted through dirt beside the Magnolia Plantation’s slave quarters to find dice and coins. She interviewed former tenant farmers to trace the outlines of a typical day. She gave tours, once to a man who had lived there.

Over the years, the oral histories she collected made their way into archives and onto the dozens of historic signs and markers arranged across the national park’s two sister plantations, set a few miles apart along the winding Cane River in Natchitoches Parish.

One sign near the entrance of Magnolia describes the scale of the plantation at its height: 275 enslaved people



A dog stands on the porch of the former Magnolia plantation hospital at Cane River Creole National Historical Park in Derry.

living in 70 cabins cultivated cotton and other crops. Near those small brick cabins, later home to tenant farmers, a sepia sign describes the gardens that once encircled them, quoting from one of Teal’s interviews. “We had a big garden... Peas, okra, tomatoes, pumpkins...”

Now, the 62-year-old worries about what stories this place will soon tell.

Signs posted across this national park’s 63 acres, like those at parks,

monuments, battlefields and historic sites across the country, might disappear or look very different in coming weeks.

As part of President Donald Trump’s directive to restore “truth and sanity to American history,” the National Park Service is reviewing signs and materials at its 433 sites for “inappropriate content.”

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Weary of crime, N.O. residents open to federal help

But some question if deploying National Guard is the best approach

BY ANTHONY MCAULEY | Staff writer

It was only a few months ago that National Guard troops arrived in the streets of downtown New Orleans.

Armed with rifles and dressed in fatigues, their presence was a show of force following the Bourbon Street terror attack, aimed at calming fears as the city prepared to host the Super Bowl.

Now, city residents and civic leaders are reckoning with the likely return of those soldiers as part of President Donald Trump’s latest move to suggest that stopping crime in Democratic-led cities requires military help.

During an Oval Office news conference last Wednesday, Trump said he was considering sending National Guard troops to patrol New Orleans,

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Effects of Hurricane Rita linger 20 years later

Southwest Louisiana storm forgotten in wake of Katrina

BY MEGAN WYATT | Staff writer

Nicole J. Moncrief was caring for her wheelchair-bound mother and her two nieces as Hurricane Rita barreled toward their Lake Charles home 20 years ago.

Ahead of previous storms, none of which caused major damage, her mom was the one to secure the family home and evacuate everyone to safety. But those responsibilities fell to Moncrief, then 34, ahead of Rita.

While her family evacuated north, Rita’s winds ripped open the roof of their family home, destroying most of their

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WEATHER

HIGH 90
LOW 73

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