

Remembering Slavery and Emancipation: Results of Community Conversations with Virginia Residents

Final Report to the Virginia General Assembly's Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial Commission

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**REMEMBERING
SLAVERY, RESISTANCE, AND FREEDOM**

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Remembering Slavery, Resistance, and Freedom Project: Project Background

Remembering Slavery, Resistance, and Freedom (the *Remembering* Project) was developed as a partnership with the Lincoln subcommittee of the Virginia General Assembly's Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial Commission (the MLK Commission), the College of William and Mary, and the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities (VFH). In light of the energy and funds dedicated by the Commonwealth to commemorating the 150th anniversary of the Civil War, the MLK Commission, under the leadership of Senator Henry L. Marsh III, took the lead in developing State initiatives to commemorate the Sesquicentennial of the Emancipation Proclamation. The *Remembering* Project grew out of the Commission's desire to learn how African Americans in Virginia wanted to remember the historic anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation. The MLK Commission accepted the Institute for Historical Biology's (IHB) conceptual proposal for the *Remembering* Project in October 2010. In December of 2010, the IHB was charged with housing the *Remembering* Project and seeking additional funds for the planning and implementation of *Remembering* Project programs. The Project Team invited a group of 12 expert advisors to join them in applying for an Interpreting America's Historic Places Planning Grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities submitted in January 2011, requesting \$74,526. Although the proposal received very favorable comments from reviewers, a grant was not awarded and an alternative pilot program was proposed to the MLK Commission (see Appendix 1 for a copy of the proposal).

The MLK Commission and the College of William and Mary's Office of the Vice President for Research granted the *Remembering* Project \$15,000 and \$11,000, respectively, to engage communities in each of the five regions of the Commonwealth between November 2011 and July 2012. The primary goal was to learn the themes and modes of commemoration most resonant for African Americans in Virginia. A team of expert advisors met four times to provide guidance throughout the process.

***Remembering* Project Team**

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Expert Advisors

Dr. Cassandra Newby-Alexander, Professor of History, Norfolk State University
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Ana Edwards, Chair, Sacred Ground Historical Reclamation Project
Patrick Farris, Executive Director, Warren Heritage Society
Marquette Folley, Project Director, Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service (SITES)
Dr. Grey Gundaker, Professor of American Studies and Anthropology, College of William and Mary
Louis Hicks, Former Director, Alexandria Black History Museum
Dr. Micki McElya, Associate Professor of History, University of Connecticut
Dr. Hollis Pruitt, Assistant Professor of English, Thomas Nelson Community College
Dr. Lynn Rainville, Research Professor in Humanities, Sweet Briar College
Paula Royster, Founder and President of the Center for African American Genealogical Research, Inc.
Dr. Shawn Utsey, Professor of Counseling Psychology & Department Chair of African American Studies, Virginia Commonwealth University

The Advisors include Virginia community activists, artists, political leaders, museum specialists, anthropologists, a genealogist, an historian, and a psychologist and award-winning documentary film producer. Each of the Expert Advisory Team members specializes in aspects of African American life, history, memory, and memorialization. The *Remembering* Project Team of Expert Advisors and the IHB provided \$14,979 in cash and \$34,990 in-kind contributions (see Appendix 2 for financial reports). The Advisors generously contributed their time, knowledge, and expertise, pro bono. Our Community Partners made pilot and implementation programming possible with their substantial donations of time, knowledge, resources, and facilities. Preliminary results (last reported to the MLK Commission on May 22, 2013) were used to develop memorial programs honoring the rich and complex lives, histories, contributions, acts of resistance, innovations and sacrifices of enslaved Africans and African Americans.

The VFH granted a total of \$6,200 through awards of an Open Grant and a Discretionary Grant to support program implementation in 2013 and 2014. Matching cash and in-kind donations provided by the IHB, the College of William and Mary, our community-based partners, and private donations totaled \$45,110.

Cemeteries and Sites Associated with Slavery and Resistance

A special feature of our charge was to identify and commemorate cemeteries, buildings, and sites of resistance created by enslaved Africans and African Americans in Virginia; we believe these sites are memorials to the humanity of the enslaved.

We presented this charge to community participants as background to the *Remembering* Project. Where community members expressed desire to incorporate cemeteries, buildings, and sites of resistance into planned programming, we did so.

A database of historic cemetery sites where enslaved Africans and African Americans are buried, as well as sites identified by participants, is included in Appendix 3.

Statewide Pilot Community Conversations: A Community-Engaged Philosophy and Model

The *Remembering* Project operates from a commitment to a human right to know one's heritage and history. Furthermore, we entered this project with the ethical position of doing no harm.

Consistent with these positions, we acknowledge African descendant communities as entitled to an authorial role in the narration, representation, and memorialization of their heritage and history. How African Americans in Virginia chose to commemorate the Sesquicentennial, what themes and historic sites are meaningful in this commemoration, and how such meaning is articulated, are discussions that guided subsequent program design.

In collaboration with community-based organizations, eight community meetings were held in the Northern, Coastal, Central, Valley and Southwest regions of the Commonwealth between November 2011 and July 2012. Regional invitations were sent to the constituents of our local partners, such as historical associations and cultural centers. We invited the public to present its own views and narratives on the sites and themes they found meaningful.



Location	City	Region	Date
Warren Heritage Society	Front Royal	Valley	November 2011
Alexandria Black History Museum	Alexandria	Northern	January 2012
Newsome House Museum	Newport News	Coastal	April 2012
Valentine Richmond History Center	Richmond	Central	April 2012
Elegba Folklore Society	Richmond	Central	April 2012

Afro-American Historical Association of Fauquier County	The Plains	Northern	May 2012
Josephine School Museum	Berryville	Valley	May 2012
Appalachian African American Cultural Center	Pennington Gap	Southwest	July 2012

Following a model of Community Engagement developed by Dr. Michael Blakey and the New York African Burial Ground Project Team (La Roche and Blakey 1997; Blakey 1998; Blakey 2010), the *Remembering* Project designed conversations that would foster informed dialogue and allow the Project Team to assess emergent themes to guide program design and implementation. The project also offered the IHB an opportunity to further develop its alternatives to bioarchaeology where descendant community preferences favor documentation, memorialization, and education over skeletal analyses.

Methodology

Procedures for conducting community-engaged research were reviewed and approved by the Protection of Human Subjects Committee of the College of William and Mary (see Appendix 4 for a list of approved protocols). Team members provided each participant a packet upon arrival. A consent form, an anonymous demographic survey form, and anonymous written response forms were included in the packet. Michael Blakey read the consent form aloud and audience members were offered time to choose to stay, ask questions, leave (choose not to participate), and/or sign their consent. Part of the consent included providing permission for the Team to digitally record the meetings. No video or cameras were allowed, in order to create a safe space where people could choose to remain anonymous, or not.

Demographic and written response forms had a unique and randomly selected identifier. Participants were invited to wear a name tag with the same identifying number. This enabled oral and written responses to be matched, anonymously, to demographic data. Consent forms were collected at the beginning of the program (and stored in secure locations at the College), so that individual names were not linked to demographic information or responses. If participants chose to identify themselves by name, they were welcome to do so.

Team leaders Michael Blakey and Autumn Barrett provided an overview of the project background and goals. A series of questions were asked to understand participant perceptions of themes related to slavery, the Emancipation Proclamation, and the Sesquicentennial commemorative period (see the lists of example questions in Appendix 5). We asked how people learned these histories, what sites they visited, and their reflections on these early and life-long learning experiences. We asked what modes of commemoration residents wanted, and if there were local and regional sites that should be included in commemoration programs. A list of suggestions was displayed to facilitate conversation (also found in Appendix 5).

Undergraduate and graduate student assistants took notes on the oral conversations, matching identifying numbers to oral comments. These notes were later used in the transcription process to link oral responses to demographic data.

The intensive process of transcribing and coding each of the Community Conversations was conducted by nine undergraduate and graduate researchers between 2012 and 2014.¹

Outreach

Flyers, announcements, and reminder emails were sent to our *Remembering* Project network of participants, community-based organizations, and partners. Some members of this network also shared the announcements with their email lists. These combined lists reached a maximum of 4,184 people for each event. Flyers and outreach materials were developed in collaboration with community partners. One sample of each flyer may be found in Appendix 6.

A project website (<http://wmpeople.wm.edu/site/page/remembering>) and Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/rsrpf>) were created and served to promote Community Conversations, partner events, and ongoing commemorative programming (see Appendix 7).

Content Analysis

The following discussion provides a content analysis summary of the eight pilot Community Conversations funded by the MLK Commission and the College of William and Mary during 2011 - 2012. Meetings were archived using digital voice recorders, as approved by the College of William and Mary's Protection of Human Subjects Committee. Graduate and undergraduate research assistants transcribed and coded the meetings to identify themes and patterns associated with regional and participant demographics.

Demographic Synopsis

Demographic information in the form of written and oral responses was provided by 147 of the 172 participants in the eight meetings. More than 62% of respondents were women, 34% were men (4% chose not to respond concerning their gender).

The majority of meeting participants were African American (62%); 29.9% were European American and 4.1% cited Mixed Ethnicity, primarily identifying as descendants of Africans and/or Native Americans, and Europeans². In terms of age, more than three out of five (63.9%) respondents reported being 55 years or older, with 37.4% between the ages of 55 and 64 years old and 26.5% being 65 and older. Seventeen percent (17%) were in the 45 to 54 age range; 6.1% were 35 to 44 years of age; 4.1% were 25 to 34 years of age; and 2.0% were 18 to 24.³

More than four out of five (82.5%) of the respondents reported continuing their education beyond high school or technical school. Respondents holding a bachelor's degree accounted for 24.8% of the total. Participants holding a masters or doctorate represented 28.5% and 20.4%, respectively. Nearly nine percent (8.8%) received an associate's degree or attended college without graduating.⁴

Nearly one-third (48) of the 147 participants declined to respond regarding their household income. Of the 99 participants who provided household income information, 40.4% reported income of \$51,000 to \$100,000; 23.2% cited income of \$101,000 to \$200,000; and 22.2% were in the \$21,000 to \$50,000 range. Household incomes of less than \$20,000 were reported by 10.1%, while 4.0% listed their incomes at more than \$201,000.

¹ Dr. Stephanie Hasselbacher was generous in volunteering her expertise in choosing a transcription program, and in training graduate students in the use of this specialized software.

² 4% of the 147 chose not to identify ethnicity.

³ 10 attendees (6.8%) did not provide their ages.

⁴ Based on 137 respondents.

As the demographic synopsis reflects, participants were mostly educated professionals. Almost one third of our participants (30%) were retired. Active and retired educators comprised 18.4% of our participants, and 9.2% reported working in history and cultural organizations. Our outreach to historic associations and museums in building a network of participants may have influenced participation of educators and public history professionals in the eight meetings.

Sixty-two (62) of the respondents shared where they grew up or were educated. Of that number, the majority (60%) were raised or educated in Virginia. An additional 6% were raised in other southern states.

Analysis of the written responses to questions and oral discussions are organized by topic, below. Although there was overlap in language among participants in all regions, divergent patterns were most evident among ethnic identities, rather than age, region, gender, or household income.

Discussions of Slavery

We asked participants their thoughts and feelings about the word “slavery” and how they felt discussing slavery.⁵ African American and European American participants associated “slavery” with “injustice,” “bondage,” and “lack of control” as well as the strength and resilience of enslaved African Americans in the “fight for freedom” and “justice.” African American participants also associated slavery with “loss of history and culture,” “white denial of responsibility,” and “white privilege.” Connections between the past of slavery and contemporary African American experiences of racism and injustice were most clearly made by African American participants.

Sadness, pain, anger, resentment, anxiety, discomfort, awkwardness, hesitance, and shame were emotions expressed by African American and European American participants.⁶ However, the associations made and expression of personal relationships to the history of slavery differed among African Americans and European Americans.

African American men and women expressed feeling a “mixture” of emotions regarding discussions of slavery. “Anger,” “pain,” “disgust,” “remorse,” and sadness were expressed by African American participants in reflecting on the inhumanity of enslavers as humans who viciously enslaved and committed acts of violence against fellow humans. African Americans conveyed personal connections to the painful emotions evoked by reflecting on the inhumanity inflicted on their ancestral family members by enslavers.⁷

For participants with African ancestry, difficult emotions were coupled with feelings of “pride,” “respect,” feeling “blessed,” “grateful,” and “humbled.”⁸ These emotions and associations were

⁵ The word “slavery” was shown in the first two Community Meetings and participants were asked to write their thoughts, feelings, and associations with the word. The question, “how does slavery make you feel?” was asked and displayed on a power point slide in the remaining 6 meetings.

⁶ Among the 43 European Americans who answered the written questions on “slavery” discussing slavery, 28% expressed feeling sad or associating sadness with slavery in comparison with 14.9% of the 74 African American respondents. Pain and feeling “bad” or “hurt” were reported by 9.5% of the African American respondents and 7% of the European American respondents.

⁷ Anger and resentment were included in 28.4% (n=21) of the written responses provided by African Americans, compared with only 2.3% (n = 1) among European American respondents. One third (n=1) of respondents who identified as ethnically mixed expressed anger when reflecting on slavery.

⁸ Feeling pride when discussing slavery was specifically expressed by 16.2 % (n=12) of African American respondents, 33.3% (n=1) of respondents of mixed ethnicity. No European American respondents associated slavery or discussions of slavery with pride.

related to the “survival,” “strength,” “determination,” “defiance, dignity, and determination,” of enslaved African and African Americans who “persevered,” “survived,” and “died for freedom, human rights, and social justice” to make a better life for their descendants today. African American participants also expressed feeling motivated and responsible for learning more about the history of slavery and resistance and teaching younger generations these histories.

“I have mixed feelings; reluctance, pride that I am descended from people who survived a horrific institution. Sad, loss - a real sense of loss, not knowing who my ancestors were beyond the barrier of slavery and before, and sad, (I repeat), very sad. I once had a young teenage girl say to me how she didn’t want to hear or read about Black History because it made her sad. I understand what she felt. The difference between us is that I have always wanted to learn about the conditions of people in slavery, where the enslaved people come from and what their lives were like.” (African American woman, aged 72 years, Coastal region)

“Ashamed. [Discussing slavery] motivates me to write about the strong Black women - all black women - who resisted it...Our history is incomplete without the perspective of slaves, both male and female.” (African American woman, aged 64, Southwest region)

“Discussing slavery makes me feel sad (because of the trials my ancestors had to encounter); it makes me feel proud (very proud) because I know that I am the descendant of very strong individuals who have passed to me the wonderful ability to overcome trials; to question wrongs; to persevere in spite of my environment. I’m very proud of my ancestors and seek to learn more about them through my research!” (African American woman, 76 years old, Valley region)

“Very proud to have come so far in a very short time even though it was a long time coming and a long struggle. There is a...magnitude of rights that [have] NOT been rectified yet.” (African American woman, 77 years old, Valley region)

“I think about my family - the members born enslaved and the members who were lucky to be born free. I wonder if there will ever be a time when lives and a person’s place in society will not be influenced by that word and its history in the U.S. I think of what we do not know about the culture of the enslaved and how much has been lost. I think about the many people who have no interest in this history and who feel it has no impact on American culture. What will this mean for the future of race relations in the [US]?” (African American woman, 56 years old, Northern region)

“Discussing slavery bring[s] up one main unresolved issue and that is Caucasian/White/European denial of responsibility for perpetuating slavery and that whether directly responsible [enjoy] the benefit and privileges accrued to them by the institution of slavery. This includes contemporary Americans of European descent who continue to distance themselves from the historical issue.” (Woman of mixed ethnicity, 61 years old, Central region)

“Discussing slavery makes me feel proud of the resistance and resilience of people of African descent who were enslaved in the Americas - not just the United States and perhaps not even primarily in the United States. I grieve the incredible pain that African men, women, and children endured, survived, or succumbed to. I prefer to think about and discuss slavery as a system of oppression and exploitation that injured the oppressed and the oppressor, although the oppressor’s gender, racial and economic positions may have provided the luxury of not having to think about slavery in those terms. I feel slavery is not something to be forgotten, diminished, or [R]omanticized.” (African American woman, 43 years old, Central region)

“Filled with mixed emotions on the level of evil that did and continues to exist. I feel no

relief because I did not commit this injustice. I feel that there is no price that could ever be paid that would ease the damage. I believe an apology from descendants of slave holders is pointless.” (African American man, 62 years old, Central region)

African American men and women expressed feeling comfortable discussing slavery, for various reasons, including pride in the achievements and strength of enslaved ancestors and viewing slavery as a part of history that needs to be discussed rather than hidden.

“Fine. It’s not discussing slavery that is usually troublesome for me, but the context in which it is discussed. I understand that it is a ‘period’ (timeline) topic, but I don’t think enough information is typically provided about ‘the slave’ i.e.

- what were the African influences (other than song and dance)
- little discussion is offered about resistance efforts in the public arena (African heroism).
- describing the place[s] slaves came from - rather than ‘slave dungeons’ or ‘slave ships’ or ‘strongholds of plantations’ in Africa/ America.
- what were the slave trails in Africa?” (African American woman, 50 years old, Central region)

One African American woman in the Coastal region said that discussing slavery makes her “feel like part of American history,” a sentiment also expressed by an African American man in the Central region, who feels like he is “part of history” and feels a sense of “progress” in his life when discussing slavery. Within responses to how discussing slavery made participants feel, African American men and women expressed the fight for freedom and equality as a long trajectory from slavery into the present. This theme emerged at various points in written responses and oral dialogues.

“These days...it [is] just another kind of slavery without the ball and chain. But it make[s] me...have more respect for the slaves because they were strong. And that make[s] me strong.” (African American woman, aged 57 years, Valley region)

Some African Americans and European Americans expressed discomfort and anxiety over having conversations in a multicultural context due to the potential for offensive comments and remarks emerging. A few African Americans were concerned that offensive and insensitive comments would emerge, while a few European Americans were concerned that they would be offensive or culturally insensitive due to ignorance. European American respondents were more likely to express discomfort around discussions of slavery than were African American respondents.⁹

“Sometimes discussing slavery fills me with anger and sorrow for my ancestors. I usually feel uncomfortable discussing slavery with people who are not African American, because I feel they could never understand how slavery affected and still affects people of African descent.” (Woman of mixed ethnicity, 18 years old, Southwest region)

One European American woman in the Central region said her “discomfort” came from feeling, “I do not have the right to participate in the history of those so fully rooted in ancestral stories,” concerned that she might be perceived as “disingenuous.” For some European Americans, slavery was not a topic that was personally relevant to their lives or well learned in early education.

“I do not have many conversations about slavery in everyday interactions - more frequently in a context such as the tour of Richmond’s slave trail. I have experienced

⁹ Among European American respondents, 14% (n=6) expressed anxiety, discomfort, awkwardness, and hesitancy in discussing or reflecting on slavery compared with 6.8% (n=5) of African American respondents. One person of mixed ethnicity expressed these sentiments (33.3%).

anger in virtual conversations online, usually in response to news stories, where other readers suggest that slavery is already remembered too much or that African-Americans should 'get over it' - which among other things presumes that only African-Americans would be concerned about remembering slavery." (European American woman, 44 years old, Central region)

"Discussing slavery at first, earlier in my life, made me feel uncomfortable. Being white and raised in the Midwest, it was a topic I never seriously considered until I began my studies in higher education...It still amazes me that American history has such a narrow outlook on the past. I think it is one of the greatest problems we are facing - all people should be able to look back to the structures that are still shaping our lives. I am no longer uncomfortable talking about slavery." (European American woman, 31 years old, Central region)

The sadness, pain, and anger expressed by European Americans were related to the brutality of slavery and the contradiction of American ideals, with one person asking "I wonder how slavery could have happened, given [European] enlightenment."

European Americans also expressed pain for slavery having occurred in their locality and in the United States. For one woman, the pain was associated with feelings of responsibility, but shame was expressed as "shame on the city" and the nation. European Americans were more likely than African Americans to express shame or embarrassment around discussions of slavery.¹⁰ However, pain and shame were associated with the institution of slavery as a "blight" on U.S. history, with European American participants referring to slavery as the "original sin" of the U.S.

Although feelings of guilt and responsibility were not as common as sadness, shame, and anxiety, only European American respondents discussed feeling guilt or responsibility in writing about slavery.¹¹ In the Northern region, one European American descendant of slaveholders said that she felt "guilty and sad about my family's history of slave ownership" and "happy" that slavery is "now being discussed more openly throughout society." European American comments included feeling "distant" and "awkward" and "removed." European American men and women expressed feelings of sadness, "shame" and "guilt" for slavery by locating these emotions at abstract levels of the city, state, and nation.

"Discussing slavery makes me feel sad - sad for all the men and women who experienced it and sad for the mark it has left on our country and society. My family are immigrants to the US, post-1900s-so I have no family stories or experiences of the period when slavery existed in the US." (European American woman, 62 years old, Central region)

European Americans acknowledged present social inequity and injustice as legacies of slavery and a few acknowledged white privilege. Some European Americans noted the absence of direct familial connections to slaveholders.

"As a white northerner who grew up thinking slavery was in the distant past, it feels very odd to be discussing it in Richmond, where its effects are so clearly present and yet largely unacknowledged." (European American woman, 65 years old, Central region)

"I generally do not feel responsible for slavery given what I know of my family's history. However, I am aware that I have received long term benefits of it (or more correctly, of

¹⁰ Among European American respondents, 14% (n=6) expressed shame and/or embarrassment. These emotions were reported in 3 responses (4%) from African Americans.

¹¹ Four European Americans (9.4%) discussed feelings of guilt and responsibility in relationship to reflections on slavery.

the political and legislative practices of the 100 years since the end of slavery). I struggle to understand the generic effect of slavery on African Americans that some claim are true, unless they have a general knowledge of that history. More I sense the struggle - economic and educational - are the result of the subsequent 100 years, more so than directly from slavery.” (European American man, 42 years old, Central region)

“I’m all for [discussing slavery]. I am interested in hearing about various aspects of it. It can be unfortunate at times being white though I know of no slave holding ancestors.” (European American man, 64 years old, Central region)

“A bit awkward and a bit removed. I am white but from New England and with no slave ownership in my ancestry, but still racially connected to the perpetrators.” (European American man, 58 years old, Valley region)

“I am deeply saddened by the history of slavery. Although my family had no slaves, I realize there is a cultural responsibility we as white Americans bear, and this causes me to feel shame and horror at what was done by my ancestors. I also feel frustration that it is so difficult to express my feelings with the black community. Someone told me once they will never forgive, and that makes me feel unsure and confused about this.” (European American woman, 69 years old, Southwest region)

African Americans made personal connections to the histories slavery and the lived experiences of enslaved men, women, and children. Such connections were made by discussing family histories, pride, and feelings of pain and sadness regarding the conditions of slavery and violence experienced by their ancestors.

“Discussing slavery brings about memories of how my ancestors were mistreated! E.g. not being able to trace the family tree because a great - - - grandmother was sold to serve as a wet nurse - and she had to leave her own children to nourish someone who is not even related.” (African American woman, 74 years old, Valley region)

“My great grandfather was a slave owned by a Clarke County landowner whose land is in walking distance of the home that I was raised in and I still live there.” (African American woman, 77 years old, Valley region)

For some participants, slavery in the U.S. is contextualized (or decontextualized) as part of “the past.” One European American man clarified this connection by saying he associates slavery with “the past. Not the recent past of America but the ancient past of Egyptians and Romans.” Some European American participants characterized slavery as part of “human” history, or even an “evil” with positive outcomes.

“I feel sadness that [slavery] was ever practiced in the colonies or the United States. I have come to understand, however, that because it was practiced, and because it brought African people to North America, much has been added to American culture that separates the American people from other people around the world. It was and is an evil human practice and institution, but it has worked-out in an unexpected way in the U.S.” (European American man, 50 years old, Valley region)

“I guess I feel indifferent talking about [slavery], although I do recognize that slavery is a dark, almost evil part of not only American history, but world history.” (European American woman, 18 years old, Southwest region)

“In some respects, the revered slavery makes me feel uncomfortable to verbalize. It is a topic that most people are not well versed in and know about. In a mixed audience, slavery is a very embarrassing event. Slavery is in the past and I am unable to...change what has happened.” (No demography information submitted, Northern region)

One African American man in the Northern region said that learning of other peoples who had been enslaved was helpful to him. He wished he had “learned more about the rationale as to why we were in slavery,” but said,

“One thing that eased my mind was...after I had read enough history, I said, ‘wait a minute, we weren’t the only people that were enslaved.’ There were Egyptians that were enslaved at one point, and, you know, Jews that were enslaved. So that kind of eased my mind a little bit, that we weren’t the only ones to suffer the pain of slavery.”

Two European American museum professionals (one man and one woman) in the Valley region expressed that European Americans are conflicted in wanting to feel pride for their ancestors while being unsure how to reconcile this desire with their ancestors who were engaged in slavery and/or the defense of slavery.

“If you are white and your ancestor fought in the Confederate army...you might be trying to think in positive terms about grandpa, while at the same time coming to terms with the fact that, as a contemporary American, you feel conflicted because you understand that slavery is bad and evil and wrong. So, you’re having a difficult time with that.” (European American man, Valley region)

Rather than making personal and familial connections to the history of slavery, European American participants were more likely to express personal and/ or familial distance from slavery, even if expressing pain or sadness over the violence and inhumanity experienced by enslaved men and women. Within European American responses, there is a mixture of acknowledging slavery’s legacies today and a disavowal of personal connections to or responsibility for those legacies. Slavery is discussed as a very unfortunate historical fact that has historically connected implications in the present (including white privilege), but the European American participants did not express feeling personally connected to the histories or legacies of slavery.

African American discussions of slavery were expressed as personally relevant at the levels of nation, state, locality, and family. In contrast, European Americans framed slavery as part of human history and world history, or as a shameful and painful part of national, regional, and local history largely dissociated from family histories and personal experiences.

A woman of mixed ethnicity in the Central region characterized European American representations of slavery and emancipation “as an African American phenomenon, that occurred “in a vacuum.” She identified this as a barrier to inter-racial healing, saying that European Americans do not recognize how slavery benefited European Americans in the past and in the present. For this woman, European American denial of white privilege as a legacy of slavery is related to the ways European Americans distance themselves from the histories of slavery and emancipation.

“European Americans always – well, from my point of view – take [the history of slavery and emancipation] very intellectually, like...it’s not anything related to them. And I see this over and over and over again. It always becomes a very impersonal, intellectual, academic discussion, like it’s not really something that’s their history. And that’s got to change.” (Woman of mixed ethnicity, 61 years old, Central region)

The discussions and written responses of Virginia residents indicate that slavery is considered a negative, and for some, a shameful part of U.S. history. For European Americans and African Americans, discussing slavery evokes questions of culpability and to whom the shame of this legacy belongs. For European American Virginians, framing slavery as a phenomenon found throughout human history, or world history, places the practice of enslaving human beings in a broader, less unique context, rather than an institution perpetuated by Europeans and their

descendants. Artificial bounding of African American history within the period of slavery associates being enslaved with African American experiences and identities, while disassociating European American involvement in and gains from the institution, practices, ancillary businesses, and brutality of slavery. A disconnect is created between past perpetrators and the benefits of racialized privileges and racism as ongoing contemporary legacies of slavery.

For participants of European descent, feelings of guilt or shame could be made less relevant on a personal level by discussing slavery as a human or universal phenomenon. For the participant of African descent who was relieved to learn that peoples of various ancestral origins had been enslaved, but this relief was contextualized by misrepresentations of “Africans” in the media and debunking a racist narrative of African inferiority (that purportedly enabled and justified their enslavement by Europeans).

In an interview with a Virginia public high school history teacher, Barrett (2015) found that World History was characterized as the story of how Europeans emerged, expanded, and influenced global trajectories. Europeans and their descendants were presented as the generative force behind history-as-progress. The first and second sections of high school World History were described as covering ‘prehistory’ through the European Middle Ages, setting the stage for European revolutions that would shape the trajectories of world history into the present. Historic phases, as topics of learning, were inaugurated by Europeans, and later the United States. Even if the historic topics were examples of brutality and exploitation (for example, the Crusades, Colonialism, the genocide of Native Americans, and the Atlantic trade in human captives), they were framed as driving world history. Atrocities, when framed as European history/ World History/ human history, become examples of what “people” do and have always done, obscuring power dynamics and contemporary repercussions of socially created inequities. Inhumane acts were reconfigured as evidence of perpetrators’ humanity, at the expense of dehumanized and flattened representations of the peoples against whom atrocities were committed.

A Need for Continued Discussions of Slavery

Throughout the state, participants commented on the need for open, honest, informed, and respectful conversations on slavery for educational value and social transformation. The involvement of youth was stressed in all regions. Some participants considered such discussions necessary for healing and for increased knowledge. For some African Americans, healing included social healing of racism as well as healing of African American identities. For some European Americans and African Americans, gaining knowledge had increased their comfort levels in discussing slavery.

“Discussing slavery makes me feel serious and ready to get others to discuss it as well so that it can be addressed by the total population to find solutions to help black people regain their identity...There is much to encounter before we can really get the information out to go forth and make this nation inside of a nation free from all types of slavery.” (African American woman, 49 years old, Central region)

“[Discussing slavery] affords the opportunity to make right the misconceptions of not just slavery, but Black history/ American history in general and preserve the legacy of that history.” (Woman of mixed ethnicity, 66 years old, Coastal region)

“The issue of slavery and the discussion helps to clarify misunderstandings; helps to fill gaps in historical knowledge; provides a venue to air concerns about ongoing feelings.” (African American woman, 59 years old, Northern region)

"[Discussions of slavery] are acts of accountability to and reconciliation with African Americans particularly, but also other communities of color. They raise discomfort on one hand, guilt sometimes but not shame...they can be liberating. And are transformational." (European American man, 63 years old, Central region)

"This is an overdue topic of public discourse. Slavery is regarded as America's original sin and introduces all the contradictions that will always be embedded in [the] concept of American democracy. Who belongs to the American family and under what terms? This prickly...question begins with slavery but it continues to reverberate in contemporary discourses on minority rights. Slavery is an anxiety ridden topic as it underlines the disparities between American ideals and concepts of social progress vs. the continuing realities of hierarchical society." (European American woman, 57 years old, Coastal region)

"I feel comfortable [discussing slavery] – there is a need to keep the conversation going – we need not ever forget and my biggest fear is as new generations come along the struggle seems to diminish in value." (African American woman, 49 years old, Southwest region)

Discussions of Resistance, Freedom, and the Emancipation Proclamation

Participants in the earliest meetings were asked to respond to thoughts and feelings associated with an image of the Emancipation Proclamation and, separately, the words "freedom" and "resistance." We modified this portion of the process by asking participants in subsequent meetings to discuss their thoughts on Resistance and Freedom in relationship to the Emancipation Proclamation. Although there is overlap in the various responses, components are discussed separately as well as how they were discussed in relationship to one another.

Freedom

Conceptually, "freedom" evoked notions of "having choices," "control," being able to "direct one's future," and "control one's destiny" and "everyday relations." These were overlapping comments among participants in all five regions. Ideas regarding social responsibilities were coupled with choice. Citizenship, the absence of oppression and discrimination, protection of rights, equality, access to resources, "relevance," "dignity," and "empowerment" were themes discussed in association with "freedom."

Participants of African descent associated the word "freedom" with the "struggle" for "liberty, justice, [and] equality." Some participants reported that freedom is a goal that African Americans have "not attained yet." An African American woman in the Coastal region expressed that an "illusion" of freedom has been created by European Americans.

"Is there freedom in the US for African Americans? Legacy ongoing." (African American man, 56 years old, Northern region)

European American participants spoke broadly to the limitations of freedom in the United States, while also discussing how the United States is associated with being a "bastion" and a "beacon" of freedom. A 60-year-old European American woman in the Valley region wrote that "learning about freedom (Civil War and emancipation) is a good way to be sensitized to issues of freedom in our so-called free society." A 29-year-old woman in the same region stated that the U.S. is considered the "land of the free," but "we are still in essence controlled."

Abstract characterizations of freedom, and its theoretical limitations in the United States, contrasted with African American participants' personal reflections on this topic. Within the context of discussing slavery and emancipation in the United States, the broader ideas of "freedom" were articulated with "not being owned," being able to seek family members who had

been separated. One African American man in the Coastal region associated freedom with struggling for one's self.

African Americans also commented on "freedom of the mind." One African American man in the Coastal region defined freedom as "removing the chains from our individual and collective minds." A man in the Northern region associated slavery with "suppression and oppression mentally and physically." African American men and women spoke to learning a sense of self through learning histories of Africans and African Americans. Distortions and restitutions of self-perceptions and identities were related to ways Africans and African Americans were represented (or not) in historic narratives and interpretations. Learning histories of African and African American resistance to slavery and oppression and African American contributions throughout national and world histories were key points in developing a strong sense of self. A need to redress the distorted and caricatured images of Africans in the Americas as presented in racist and Eurocentric public school curricula were woven through discussions of freedom and remembering the Emancipation Proclamation.

"I have taught my own children about resistance because I know that 'freed' their minds of embracing the idea of being a victim or being ashamed of the history of our people as African Americans." (African American woman, 45+ years old, Central region)

The Emancipation Proclamation

Participants characterized the Emancipation Proclamation as a misunderstood and complicated document with limited efficacy for bringing freedom to enslaved African Americans, a political strategy to win the civil war, and a "first step" toward equality for African Americans who were enslaved.

African American participants emphasized the strategic nature and limitations of the Emancipation Proclamation, making connections to contemporary fights for social justice and equality. Two participants in the Central region wrote that freedom was "a promise, not a reality," under the Emancipation Proclamation, but that it provided an incomplete "glimpse of Freedom."

"Freedom/ Protection...am I a citizen of the United States[,] am I an American? What are the conditions/ what will change? How does this document succeed/ fail? How does this document help me understand the life of A. Lincoln? In the 19th cen[tury], what does this mean for my place in society?" (African American woman, aged 47 years, Northern region)

African American participants also emphasized the role of enslaved and free men and women in creating their own freedom (before the Emancipation Proclamation was issued) and in "forcing Lincoln's hand." One woman said that African Americans "empowered themselves...through education...trying to find their family members...running away...stealing food" and that she didn't want "just a focus on the document because, I know some want nothing to do with the idea of Emancipation Day and celebrating it, thinking 'why should we validate something that's actually false?'...We helped free ourselves through all these different kinds of actions for a very, very long time."

"When the Emancipation Proclamation came out, Blacks were aware, especially in this area, that they're the ones that pushed the envelope in the first place; forcing the hand of the government to deal with them. And Lincoln, while he had a lot of different motives for that document, he knew that for the first time in American history the government was saying 'we'll protect you. We will protect you from the institution of slavery if you join us.'" (African American woman, no age provided, Coastal region)

“This was a sign of Lincoln’s acquiescence to the idea that he couldn’t win the war and restore the Union without fully addressing the issue of slavery. Lincoln was faced with the dilemma of preventing the South from getting much needed foreign support/aid; a lack of any substantial military success, increasing pressure of abolitionists, and Northern public resistance against the draft. The document itself actually freed no one because it was directed toward territories he had no control over. It gave the illusion of freeing enslaved peoples.” (African American man, 60 years old, Northern region)

Full freedom and social justice are still being fought for by contemporary African Americans. For some participants, slavery still exists “in different forms”.

“Has freedom been given? I think there are still shackles and chains. It seems that we are still fighting for the ultimate freedom. Although I have a successful career, home...I still deal with issues as they relate to being black and not having total undiscriminating freedom.” (African American woman, 48 years old, Northern region)

“Resistance continues and freedom is fleeting.” (African American man, 63 years old, Central region)

The Emancipation Proclamation is most generally viewed by African Americans as a historic space in which African Americans acted, rather than an act of liberation in itself. The Proclamation afforded a temporary opportunity for African Americans to continue their pursuit of freedom from an oppressive state.

Celebrating Emancipation Day

When participants were asked about Emancipation Day celebrations in their communities, past and present, African American respondents listed Watch Night at area churches and Juneteenth as known forms of celebrating Emancipation, in the past and present. Participants in the Central region were the most likely to be familiar with celebrations of Emancipation in the form of yearly Juneteenth celebrations. Elegba Folklore Society sponsors annual Juneteenth programming in Richmond, Virginia. Some participants spoke to celebrating emancipation and freedom during Memorial Day or July 4. In the Coastal, Southwest and Valley regions, participants said they remembered hearing or knew about past celebrations, but that they were no longer held. In the Southwest, Northern, and Valley regions, the cessation of annual celebrations was linked to terrorist threats or acts by racist European Americans who sought to dissuade African Americans from celebrating. The Valley region participants discussed reviving an annual Juneteenth tradition. Later, the Remembering Project collaborated with the Josephine Improvement Association and the Josephine School Community Museum and Clarke County Afro-American Cultural Center to implement a Valley region program in June 2014 (funded by a Discretionary Grant from the VFH), in the tradition of Juneteenth.

Resistance, Freedom, and the Emancipation Proclamation

Modes of resistance (such as revolt, flight, poisoning, putting ground glass in food), resistance leaders (Gabriel, Nat Turner, Harriet Tubman, John Brown, and David Walker), and sites of resistance (Fort Monroe) were noted by participants in the Northern, Coastal, and Central regions, in association with the word “Resistance.”

Comments made by participants when asked about the relationships between resistance, freedom, and the Emancipation Proclamation continued to critique a mythical notion of Lincoln as the “Great Emancipator” and referenced African American self-liberation as the source of

African American freedoms. One African American woman in the Valley region said that “without resistance there is no freedom.” For some African Americans, there is “absolutely no” relationship at all between resistance, freedom, and the Emancipation Proclamation. This was very clearly expressed in the Central region:

“I relate [resistance and freedom] to the Emancipation Proclamation because that is what it is all about, slaves being resistant to slavery - with all of their rebellions – and freedom; what they finally achieved, it is because of their resistance that they achieved freedom.” (African American woman, 18 years old, Central region)

“‘Freedom’ was a promise but not a reality until around the 1960s. Although not complete, ‘Freedom’ still has not been totally obtained, and as progress is made setbacks arise daily. ‘Resistance’ was not a part of the proclamation. Resistance preceded the proclamation...” (African American man, 62 years old, Central region)

“I don’t because I relate ‘Freedom’ to ‘Freedom Justice and Equality.’ The Emancipation Proclamation relates to the Civil War and Abe Lincoln, which He said if he could have preserved the Union without Freeing the slaves he would have done so!!” (emphasis in the original, African American man, 53 years old, Central region)

“I see ‘resistance’ as an action that some chose regardless of and unrelated to the [Emancipation Proclamation]. Resistance and Freedom are more related to each other.” (European American woman, 45 years old, Central region)

“Freedom isn’t something that a law creates. It’s something that people have to make, most often through resistance.” (European American woman, 31 years old, Central region)

The Confederate Battle Flag and Commemorating the Civil War

In the early meetings held in the Valley and Northern regions, an image of the Confederate Battle Flag was shown, and participants were asked to write down their thoughts and associations when viewing the image.

The Confederate Battle flag was associated with supporting slavery, racism, and racists by both European American and African American participants. African American respondents were more direct in their associations with the Confederate flag’s symbolism, where European American participants often qualified the multiple and changing meanings of the flag, while still including the associations with pro-slavery sentiments, the Klu Klux Klan, and racism.

“This is a symbol of hate, racism, and white supremacy. It’s [a] means of identifying a culture and ideology rooted [in] suppression and oppression. It is a symbol of American born and bred terrorism.” (African American man, 60 years old, Northern region)

“Depending on [the] context – the flag may provoke feelings of fear for me and other African Americans...” (African American woman, 47 years old, Northern region)

“Hate → racism, people who want slavery.” (African American man, 56 years old, Northern region)

“Slavery, oppression, suppression, white supremacy, Jim Crow, segregation, For whites only.” (African American man, 60 years old, Northern region)

European Americans described the flag as a multivalent and contested symbol, signifying “rebellion,” “anti-African American,” and southern white heritage. For some European American participants, the flag was associated with “anti-progress” and with “redneck” European

Americans of lower socio-economic status. European Americans referenced the flag's "historic context" in contrast with contemporary meanings of the flag.

"[The] Confederate army battle flag [was] carried by Confederate soldiers into combat during the U.S. Civil War. It has since become a contentious symbol in American culture. It is embraced by confused people who have bought into the idea of the lost cause, and that somehow the Confederate States were fighting to preserve a superior way of life where all political power was invested in the states. These folks will hotly argue that the one state right the Confederacy was defending was slavery, and that slavery was not a cause of the Civil War. It now represents a way of expressing dissatisfaction with contemporary life and politics in the U.S., and way of testing the resolve of a society and political system striving for equality and toleration of diversity." (European American man, 50 years old, Valley region)

"Treason, rebel, secessionist, racist, Jim Crow – Lost Cause. However in a historical context the South was in a desperate situation and felt this was a way to influence the decision in continuing slavery... The flag of that period can be placed in historical context. However flying the flag today over in the South can only be viewed as supporting slavery and bigotry." (European American man, 68 years old, Northern region)

"Today the Confederate flag is used as an irritant to black communities as well as being a symbol of the Lost Cause, which is not often associated with rednecks. The flag's symbolic meaning has lost its historical context as a flag of the states that seceded from the [U]nion... This [C]onfederate flag is a flag whose changing symbolism continues to influence American society." (European American woman, 63 years old, Northern region)

"1.) Heritage 2.) Racism In this area of the country the [C]onfederate flag is often promoted as an icon of southern heritage. Really I think it's more of an image and a 'brand' of a type of person that wants to be separate from the rest of the country. It is often worn or flown or promoted by someone that is racist against black people and other races. To me this image means more of a negative thing than anything positive." (European American man, 29 years old, Valley region)

Within responses to various questions during the program, some participants commented on their feelings regarding Civil War histories and commemorations of the Civil War that were occurring or might occur during the Sesquicentennial.

Some European American participants expressed their discontent over European American perceptions of the role of slavery in the Civil War and state celebrations of the Civil War. One European American woman from the Northern region felt "angry and frustrated that we 'celebrate' the [C]onfederacy as a month long state sponsored tourism event but we don't have the fortitude to recognize that the Confederacy was founded on the principle of demanding the 'right' to own human beings." Another woman said she was "tired of white people feeling uncomfortable talking about [slavery], particularly Civil War historians who want to focus on the war as an event but not in [the] context of the major cause of the war."

An African American woman in the Central region said, "It can be frustrating dealing with (southerners) who wrap themselves in nostalgia for the Lost Cause and white northerners who refuse to recognize their involvement and continued complicity in enslavement." One man expressed that he did not "want a bunch of folks waving the Confederate flag and talking about the South rising again" during the Sesquicentennial. An African American woman in the Valley region was "very annoyed at the celebration of the Civil War in this area because there was [nothing] valorous - even decent about the Confederate cause when millions of men, women, and children had been suffering since the 1620s."

Learning Histories in Virginia

We asked participants how they learned about African American history and the histories of the Emancipation Proclamation and the Civil War. We also asked participants to share with us what they wished they had learned.

Learning African American History

Much of the oral discussion was centered on how participants learned little or no African American history in their early formal education curricula. Men and women discussed learning an incomplete and limited knowledge of Africans in the Americas from school, citing undergraduate and graduate schools as a “first” exposure to in-depth learning and a process of realizing they had learned distortions and omissions, formally and informally, regarding African American histories.¹²

“I did not have African-American history - I was totally ignorant about our history until I went to college.” (African American woman, 63 years old, Central region)

Respondents of African and European descent commented on how the limited African American history education they received was compartmentalized and not “integrated” into U.S. history, but a “boutique” or “niche” history. Some men and women learned about African American history through their professions or educational research projects.

“My introduction to the Civil War was the 4th grade when we were taught that Lincoln freed the slaves, but I had no grasp of what this really meant. Later in junior high I was introduced to the Civil War in more detail and was fascinated with the magnitude of the war and the polarization of whites. Curiously enough though, I was left with the impression that blacks were worthless, didn’t participate in the war effort, had no prior history and literally made no contribution to mankind. I wish I had learned in school the true story about slavery and the former enslaved participation in ‘saving the [U]nion,’ particularly from the view of former enslaved.” (African American man, 60 years old, Northern region)

“[I]t was taught in school for one week and it was called Negro history week. We did not know anything about Africans coming to America and our ancestors. Schools now have African American History month....” (African American woman, 74 years old, Northern region)

Self-education, learning from family members, family discussions, genealogical or family research, “sitting at the feet of the elders” and community activities, barber shops, religious institutions (church, mosque), museums, historic site visits, traveling nationally and internationally, reading, and movies (like “Roots” and “Amistad”) were the common modes of learning African American history reported by participants of African descent.¹³ Attending a Historically Black College or University (HBCU) was noted as a key context for learning African American histories. One African American man in the Central region recalls his “exposure to [African American history] increased exponentially” while attending an HBCU and that “the most powerful concepts that I learned about were ‘quilombos’ and resistance to oppression.” For

¹² Among the 73 participants who responded to the written question asking how they learned African American history, 56.2% (n=41) had received little or no African American history during their early education. Two thirds of the European American respondents (66.7%) reported receiving little or no early education in African American histories. The majority of African American respondents (54.3%) also reported this trend. One third (n=1) of the participants of mixed ethnicity reported receiving little or no African American history education.

¹³ Among African American respondents, 28.3% learned African American history through self-education. The majority (66.7%) of respondents claiming African ancestry or mixed ancestry also reported this trend.

participants who attended segregated schools, African American history was remembered as a key part of their curriculum.

“I learned AA history in segregated institutions (home, church, neighborhoods) that had been informed by family histories. Integrated history has for a long period failed to include AA history as a necessary component of American history.” (African American woman, 64 years old, Central region)

“I learned African American history in our home and local mosque. With my own children I sought out scientist[s] [and] inventors to expand their own knowledge and to round it out. I was never taught this in school - only home and mosque.” (Woman of African descent, 45+ years old, Central region)

European American participants reported learning African American history through “limited” resources such as family members and images. Self-education was a primary mode of learning African American history¹⁴, followed by learning from African American friends and associates. Experiences traveling and living in various parts of the nation and in the U.S. south were cited as educational for some European Americans. Though two women in the Valley and Central regions and one man in the Northern region learned African American history from their family, this was not a general trend among European American participants.¹⁵ One European American woman in the Northern region included the question, “Does my ethnicity provide barriers to understanding a cultural memory of the impact of slavery?” in her response.

African American and European American participants wish they had learned more about African American histories earlier in life. African Americans reported wanting to know more about how enslaved men, women, and children resisted slavery and the histories of ancient African civilizations and cultures. African American men and women wished they had learned “truth” in history, earlier. George Washington’s slaveholding was given as an example of one such truth by an African American woman in the Valley region. A desire to have learned a “true and full account” of African American contributions to the United States and world history, more about ancient African histories and cultures and the contributions of African peoples “to civilization” were expressed. One woman in the Central region wished she had learned about Egypt as part of “Black Africa” rather than artificially separated. An African American man in the Northern region wished African American history had been contextualized as part of “world history.” One African American man in the Coastal region wanted to know more about “common people” rather than solely about “great Black men” such as Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Du Bois.

For some participants of African descent¹⁶, there was a desire to have learned more from elders and other members of their family, to know more about their family members’ roles in African American history, and to know more about their local histories. European American participants wish they had learned more about African American history, culture, and origins, the daily lives and perspectives of enslaved and newly emancipated men and women, and about African American leaders and contributions throughout U.S. history. Two younger participants (28 - 29 years old) in the Valley region commented on the skewed and limited perspectives they received being taught solely by European American educators.

“I was taught by white men and women for history courses in school. I wish I would have been taught more about the African American experience of and perspective of

¹⁴ Among European American respondents, 28.6% reported learning African American history through self-education.

¹⁵ Among African American respondents, 39.1% (n=18) learned African American history from family members, compared with 14.3% (n=3) of European American respondents (n=3) who reported family members as a source of learning African American histories. Among African descended respondents 66.7% (n=2) learned African American history from family members. Among respondents of mixed ethnicity, 66.7% (n=2) learned from family.

¹⁶ This refers to all participants who identified as African descended.

their own history. It seems most of what I've been taught was from one perspective and an outsider's view on a different culture." (European American man, 29 years old, Valley region)

One European American woman attributed her own "inappropriate" actions in the past to learning erroneous perspectives from her European American community members:

"I wish I had learned more about African American culture. Certain words or attitudes I heard growing up in a rural area I often too late learned were not appropriate. Growing up in a diverse society would have given me more opportunities to learn and share." (European American woman, 45 years old, Northern region)

Learning about the Emancipation Proclamation and the Civil War

Participants reported learning about the Emancipation Proclamation in school, with reports of elementary, middle, and/or high school, and university education among more specific responses. A lack of depth or complication in the learning process was commented on by African American participants who said they received a "conventional" education that "Lincoln Freed the slaves" or that they remembered a "very brief reference" to Abraham Lincoln. One African American woman in the Central region wrote that she "learned and understood [the Emancipation Proclamation] as a complicated, limited, strategic document - part of a series of documents before it and after it" in graduate school. Participants also taught themselves on these topics. One European American man in the Valley region commented that one must "be prepared to dig deeper" for a more complex understanding of the Civil War and the Emancipation Proclamation.

"Most likely [I learned about the Emancipation Proclamation] during a history class in grade school. I never discussed it or thought about it again. I just knew that [it] was the historical document that set me 'free.'" (African American woman, 63 years old, Central region)

African American participants reported learning "away from school," specifically through self-directed learning and research, from church and community programs and media. Family and family histories were sources of learning for African Americans in the Northern, Coastal, and Central regions.

European Americans in the Northern and Valley regions learned about the Civil War and the Emancipation by visiting museums and historic sites. European American participants were more likely than African Americans to have visited Civil War battlefields.¹⁷ One woman commented on the living memory of the Civil War and the pervasiveness of Civil War history in "the culture of the area where I was raised." She wrote:

"Some of the most notable battle[s] of the war took place in our own backyard. The effects of the war (although warped [and] 'understudied') are still very much alive in this area. The heritage of the south vs. the north is still a raw topic here." (European American woman, 28 years old, Valley region)

¹⁷Participants of the first two meetings were specifically asked which sites associated with the histories of slavery, resistance, and/or the Civil War they had visited. In these meetings, 100% of the European American respondents reported they had visited Civil War battlefields (n=11). In subsequent meetings, the question was modified, only asking about sites related to the histories of slavery and emancipation. Among the respondents to these written questions, two African Americans (52.6%) had visited the Antietam and Gettysburg sites. In this context, only one European American respondent (12.5%) reported visiting the Gettysburg site. In the first two meetings, some respondents marked sites as Civil War in their written responses. These data suggest that change in question shifted the context in which respondents thought about Civil War battlefields.

“Civil War history [was learned through] a litany of battles and info[rmation] about generals. Little time was spent on the Emancipation Proclamation.” (European American woman, 56 years old, Northern region)

An African American man in the Central region visited Civil War battlefields with his father; however he and his siblings “were told by my father that these were the sites which led to the ending of slavery.”

Ethnography of the Teaching of Slavery

As anthropologists we value the qualitative “ethnographic” data observed in people’s activities that also tell us how people think about slavery, resistance, and emancipation. Discussions and behaviors in the institutional setting of the educational system demonstrate how educators think and act around teaching the history of American slavery. Loaded with perceptions expressed at our community meetings, opportunities were taken to probe the teaching of slavery in Virginia and one forum was particularly revealing of the dynamic process by which certain identified problems were perpetuated.

A problem stated by many participants in our state-wide conversations is the near absence of African American and African history in public schools’ curricula. Ancillary to this are indications of very limited and biased curricula regarding slavery, emancipation, and resistance. It was clear that, while many had children educated in Virginia Schools, most of our participants tended to be of generations who completed public schooling before 1990. Some were “returning” to the south after growing up in the northern United States rather than being educated in Virginia. All participants lived in Virginia during the conversation and many were born and raised there.¹⁸ Participants represent a mix of educational experiences more or less specific to the state.

Remembering Project staff inquired about textbooks with the central administration of schools in the state (we will be using general descriptions of institutional relationships for clarity and personal anonymity). Within days of requesting lists of texts, a central administrator who knew of our work responded that we were looking in the wrong place, and that we should have known text books do not accurately tell what is taught about black history in the schools. Rather, we were told that teachers are provided with a broad range of supplementary material to apply when teaching, and were sent the State’s SOLs (Standards of Learning) giving the categories of information authorized to comprise the public school curricula. Interestingly, Blakey inquired of his students in anthropology, and, rarely, did anyone remember receiving a detailed education on Africa or the experiences of Africans in the Americas and in the U.S. Only one student had reported an African History course in a Central region high school. African American history tended to be limited to discussions of the Civil War and Martin Luther King, both representing the difficult ending of long inequitable participation in the American experience that was little discussed in the classroom. There may be, in fact, a disconnection between public agreement on what should be learned (the SOLs) and what is actually taught. A formal event sponsored by educators provides insight on how that happens.

The Project was invited to attend a major day-long forum commemorating the 150th anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation in the Northern region of Virginia. Most of the major cultural organizations concerned with Black heritage, including African American museums, the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities, the National Park Service, made presentations. One of us (Blakey) attended a forum on the teaching of slavery that was organized by a Northern Virginia school district. A central administrator of that district served as moderator of a panel comprised of four teachers who covered all student age groups. An adult, ethnically mixed audience of approximately 30 people was present.

¹⁸ Among the 62 participants who reported where they grew up, 37 (60%) individuals grew up in Virginia.

The first panel presentation was made by a 5th Grade teacher who explained how slavery was introduced to her students. Each student, we were told, was to consider the fact that slavery was pervasive and positively sanctioned (approved of) by most people while it was being implemented. Neighbors would be critical of those in Virginia who opposed slavery and, after all, “everyone’s livelihood depended on it.” Students were asked to put themselves in the place of the people who lived during slavery. Doing so, it was reported, all students could understand and agree that they too would simply have accepted slavery.

The moderator asked if there were questions. Blakey asked the 5th Grade teacher, “It makes sense to me that with 5th graders it might be difficult or improper to discuss the brutalities of slavery, but I wonder if you would consider asking them to put themselves in the place of the enslaved, who had little or nothing to gain from their enslavement. What then might students conclude about slavery’s acceptability?”

The central administrator who was moderating at the podium interceded for the teacher in what could be called a monologue, a filibuster, or a rant. In the long string of somewhat disconnected and barely coherent objections, the most repeated phrase was that “she has to follow the rules” and that the alternative was to moralize. As his discussion waned he apologized for acting to “defend” the 5th Grade teacher. Later in the discussions of other panelists it became clear that the schools had a policy of allowing students to come to their own conclusions. This seemed to be the relevant “rule.”

Among the questions and comments from the audience was the assertion that slavery was immoral: should not that be taught? Again the panelists seemed to agree it was best for students to reach such conclusions on their own. What is key here, poignantly in the example of the 5th Grade exercise, is that the point of view of whites (“people,” “most people,” “everyone’s livelihood”) are taken as the objective view of slavery. Of course, such views are highly subjective. However, perspectives positioned “in the place of the enslaved” are taken as subjective, biased, and moralizing. This, essentially white supremacist perspective of the five panelists and moderator (one panelist was African American and the others were European American) artificially structured the assumptions of the judgments of 5th Graders to those leading rationally to understanding slavery as morally acceptable.

After the closing of the panel Blakey had a conversation with a presenter, who was an elementary school teacher, a European American woman appearing to be about 40 years of age. Being asked if the fairly informative curricula presented by the panelists was the norm of information given in the schools, she reported that these instead represented the best and most informed teachers of slavery to whom others sometimes came for advice and resources. Mentioning the SOLs to her, her more detailed response described the following scenario as common:

- Educators felt they were poorly prepared with regard to teaching the substantial information they received about slavery or African American history.
- Despite earnest self-preparation, they remained a bit uncertain about their presentations of that potentially emotional history.
- Most of these teachers are women of European descent.
- It often occurred that students complained about the critical narratives of slavery and enslavers. European American parents would complain to teachers and principals. Teachers feared administrators would not “back them up.”
- Teachers often chose not to present material on slavery and African American history, even such as it had been.

This seems a plausible process by which the SOLs may be disseminated, but not accurately conveyed to students. There are likely other processes that impede the teaching of African American history and slavery, of which we are unaware. The ill preparation and discomfort of teachers can actually be ameliorated by building confidence through clear and consistent

administrative sanction of such teaching and guidance in proper uses of curricular resources in the classroom. In our statewide Community Conversations we were occasionally told that European American docents at historic sites were also often visibly uncomfortable and ill-prepared to present or discuss the African American presence and history at plantation sites. It seems to us that the concern was for their attachment to the white community and sense of obligation not to expose its immoral relationship with blacks: “how can I say those things” is one way the moment of confrontation was expressed. It remains impressive that the 5th Grade teacher who discussed how teachers backed away from the topic of slavery also indicated her appreciation for the moderator “defending” her from a calmly put question by an African American man about the efficacy of asking students to see slavery from the perspective of the enslaved.

Blakey’s analysis and discussions that emerged in the *Remembering* Project Community Conversations are consistent with Barrett’s (2015) ethnographic work with Virginia educators and residents. Barrett (2015) found that, while the Virginia Standards of Learning are rigid in outlining the content that public school history educators are to teach, the learning experience is variable and dependent upon individual teachers’ knowledge, comfort level, and personal views. Opportunities to learn about African and African American histories beyond Eurocentric curricula were limited by the perspectives and interests of each teacher, or, left to students to learn from their family members and through independent investigation.

The teachers who participated in Barrett’s (2015) study expressed feeling most effective in teaching U.S. and world history to their students when they could provide rich stories that conveyed the humanity of historic figures, or even draw on their own personal experiences growing up. Teachers of European descent discussed detailed biographical stories of the lives and complexities of historical figures such as Napoleon, Winston Churchill, George Washington, Robert E. Lee, Ulysses S. Grant, and Abraham Lincoln. Timelines and events in African and African American histories were not “fleshed out” with stories detailing personal characteristics, attributes, and even flaws, that were conveyed by biographic stories of European and European American men. By framing U.S. slavery as a part of world history, slavery is distanced from contemporary personal significance and is presented as a cautionary moral lesson of humanity’s past mistakes. Young adults of African descent who were educated in Virginia described to Barrett (2015) how these distortions and limitations of European American educators shaped their senses of self. Education at home, self-directed learning, and university courses on African and African American histories countered the deprecating narratives received in the Virginia public education system.

One Virginia teacher of U.S. History discussed African American protests against the hanging of a banner in honor of Robert E. Lee in Richmond. The teacher said “I do understand the emotions behind...the African American community getting so upset,” and he expressed appreciation for the dialogue that ensued regarding “the culture at the time.” (Barrett 2015: 463). However, he then cautioned against applying contemporary sensibilities to slaveholders in the past by saying:

“We can’t try to take an overlift of today’s thinking and put it onto them, when people weren’t thinking these things...So many people had slaves. And, they were trying to deal with it then, but when *everybody* thinks a certain way, it doesn’t make it *right*. It just makes it history. It’s just the *truth*” (emphasis in the original, Barrett 2015:463).

Similar to Blakey’s observations, this Virginia educator used “people” and “everybody” as universal descriptors of normative “white” standards. As Ruth Frankenburg (1994) has shown, European Americans (anti-racist women activists within her study) often say “people” when referring to “white people” and use ethnic or racial qualifiers that make and maintain distinctions between references to “white” humans and the rest of humanity. Furthermore, in order for the Virginia educator’s statement to be valid, (“when everybody thinks a certain way”), the

resistance of African Americans, enslaved and free, against the institution of slavery and racism must be ignored. The “culture at the time” that is being validated as objective “history” and “truth” is that of a white supremacist slaveholding society. African American protests over contemporary valorization of a prominent slaveholder and Confederate general are relegated to a subjective and emotive action that is not connected (by the educator) to the objective “truth” in “history.”

The *Remembering* Project results, combined with additional ethnographic analyses of Blakey and Barrett, indicate that multiple generations of Virginians have been teaching and learning a normalized vision of European humanity, superiority, ability, power, accomplishment, and contributions to the world and the Nation. Attendant to this skewed vision of European heritages and constructions of whiteness, are associations of African American heritage and histories with shame, passivity, and inferiority, and a lack of contributions to world history and the Nation, conveyed through distorted narratives of U.S. slavery.

Visits to Historic Sites

Participants had visited a variety of historic sites in their localities, regions, and in other states associated with the histories of slavery and emancipation. Some participants of African descent, mostly men, had traveled internationally to sites in Ghana, Senegal, and Brazil. For African American participants, how sites were interpreted was a central component in discussing experiences at historic sites.

Plantation sites, “slave cabins,”¹⁹ and Civil War battlefields were among the most common types of sites that participants had visited, in addition to museums (Colonial Williamsburg was frequently reported) and the houses of African American leaders (Booker T. Washington and Frederick Douglass, for example). African American participants noted an absence of representing the African and African American presence and African American lives in public history landscapes, in museums and exhibits. Where the lives of enslaved men and women were presented, the interpretations were “very limited” and distorted. “There is nothing about resistance or freedom,” said one European American woman in the Coastal region. One woman of mixed ancestry said that enslaved laborers were referred to as “servants” at a site she visited. For this woman, the cultural work of such historic interpretations serves to perpetuate the “mindset” of the plantation, which is “still being supported with racism and passed on from one generation to the next.”

The daily lives of men, women, and children were desired as narratives featured in the interpretation of plantation sites. In most people’s experiences, the perspectives, lives, and stories of the slaveholders were pervasive at plantation sites.

“Most of the plantations...up until now have ignored the African American presence that actually built the plantation and built the American economy.” (African American woman, 63 years old, Central region).

In referencing Civil War sites and Colonial Williamsburg, one European American woman in the Northern region wrote that slavery was discussed “in passing or [as an] insignificant part of the story.” In particular, she expressed that Colonial Williamsburg “treat[s] slavery in a more factual context.” A Central region participant referred to Jamestown and Williamsburg interpretations of history as “a bit pristine” with “no mention of the ugliness.”²⁰

¹⁹ Among respondents who answered the written question regarding historic sites visited, 35.3% included plantation sites in their responses. Among African American respondents, 34.1% (n=15) reported visiting plantation sites. A similar trend was found among European American respondents; 31.6% (n=6) reported visiting plantation sites. Two respondents of mixed ancestry (66.6%) reported visiting plantation sites and one respondent (50%) of African descent included a plantation site in his response.

²⁰ No demography information was provided by this participant.

An African American woman in the Valley estimated that less than “5% of the museums showed the presence of slaves” and where representation of enslaved people was included, it was “more like an afterthought.” An African American woman in the Coastal region found the interpretation of Monticello to be “dishonest” and she was provided with “evasive responses to questions about Jefferson.” Mount Vernon had “very limited information on slavery.”

African descended participants were often motivated to visit historic sites by a desire to learn more about their heritage. Family research and family connections to particular localities and sites also motivated site visits. The lack of African American history interpretations and representations were particularly and personally salient for participants seeking to learn more about themselves by learning about their heritage and histories.

“Every historic site in the South and Northeast is related to slavery - Emancipation - Jim Crow. They Just Don’t²¹ talk about it - I felt left out.” (African American man, 59, Central region)

Participants of African descent commented on growing up not knowing local African American history sites. One man in the Central region said that he “felt bad not knowing” the history of Shockoe Bottom as a slave trading center, having learned about it very recently. Another man in the Coastal region said that despite growing up in Yorktown, he was not aware of Yorktown’s role as a port where enslaved Africans were brought into Virginia.

“Yorktown, I found out, working at Jamestown Settlement, was...one the biggest slave ports in the country! I never knew that, and I grew up here...that’s huge!...This is so important, what we’re doing.” (Man of mixed ethnicity, 68 years old)

What was Desired in Historic Sites and Historical Interpretations?

The following list highlights themes that emerged around historic site visits and what was desired from historic site interpretation:

- Interpreting the full lives of men, women, and children who were enslaved honors their humanity and conveys their lives and contributions in a complete historic narrative.
- Marking historic sites associated with the full range of African American histories in the U.S., including sites associated with slavery and the buildings built by enslaved laborers (for example, state buildings). Marking the landscape in this way makes the presence and the contributions African Americans visible to residents and visitors, restoring a sense of history to communities.
“I would like to see the sites that have yet to be unearthed. Those places that surround us but aren’t talked about.” (African American man, 62 years old, Central region)
- Education programs and discussion forums for interpreters and museum/tour guides are needed to enable cultural workers in history to engage the difficult histories of slavery in an informed and respectful manner. Museums and sites should make connections between historical narratives on slavery and the Civil War, including battlefield sites.
- Multiple perspectives and voices were desired from historic interpretations. For African Americans, this included wanting sites to convey the histories of enslaved and free African Americans as well as European American slaveholders, but also the multiple and sometimes conflicting views and actions of past African

²¹ As written by participant.

Americans and the daily lives of known leaders and common people. European Americans reflected these desires but mentioned wanting to learn about European American participation in fighting against slavery and oppression.

- A need for greater access to public histories, rather than elitist and middle-class interpretations found at museums and plantation sites was expressed in the Central region.

A few sites were listed as examples where histories were well interpreted and represented. These included an Amistad ship reproduction in Coastal Virginia where the story was “powerfully rendered” and the “tour guides were very sincere and informative.” The Somerset Plantation was described as interpreting African American history from a “‘Black’ perspective.” The African Burial Ground in New York, the American Anthropological Association’s RACE exhibit at the Virginia Science Museum, the Lower East Side Tenement Museum, and the “very realistic” approach to West African interpretations were listed as recommended examples. One woman mentioned the “Richmond Slave Trail,” the Lumpkin’s Jail site and the Richmond African Burial Ground as examples because their interpretations “seem balanced and uplifting, yet complete.”²²

Ethnography of Slavery and a Founding Father

A Virginia college and the plantation home of an American Founding Father set aside a few days in 2013 to collaborate on how to tell the story of the enslaved. A series of speeches and panels by scholars and representatives of community groups brought national experts and local culture workers to the college to discuss examples from sites where the history of slavery and African American heritage have been interpreted. We were also given a special tour of the plantation home of a founding father, revered for his intelligence and contributions to the founding egalitarian principles of the Nation. He embodied these, and yet for some he embodied the American paradox.

The slave quarter near the house, partly reconstructed, was discussed by the archaeologists and historians who led the tour. There was scant description of daily life and Blakey (who was present) remembers little of it with the particular exception of the story of an enslaved child who died of sickness. The archaeologist serving as a tour guide characterized the scene by describing a passive or callous mother who, according to the white overseer, represented a “fact” that black mothers did not care for their children nor mourn their deaths. While this assertion was questioned from the group of 20 or so visitors, the tour leaders provided no explanation. Blakey thought of multiple, alternative interpretations. Children were being sold to other plantation owners. Such callouses might be accumulated by mothers afraid of bonding, which was cruel enough. Was it depression? Or was this a convenient story concocted by whites in which to take comfort while grabbing and redistributing the children of their workers to any distant associate who would pay for them. Or it may have been a difficult combination of both in which human beings sought to reconcile themselves with circumstances created for the benefit of European Americans alone. At least such issues might have made a useful discussion rather than the near shoulder shrug provided in response to the question of “why?” No clarification of the circumstances was offered. Blakey later brought these thoughts to bear on a guide’s explanation that the Founding Father upheld a policy of keeping families together as much as possible, which might contradict the greater extent to which such plantations were typically engaged in the domestic slave trade. And here, the idea that this plantation afforded the strengthening of familial bonds among enslaved people brought to mind the fact that the fear of loss of family and community tied to a particular plantation might keep an enslaved person from running away, neglecting work, or resisting violently. In this way they were all enslaved by their love. But this was mentioned as evidence of the beneficence and humanity of

²² Many African descendants in Richmond prefer the “Richmond Trail of Enslaved Africans.”

the slaveholding Founding Father.

These are characterizations of the site interpretation that were possible in the mind of someone who knew something of the history of slavery within which the simpler stated facts occurred, along with a critical sensibility that had become heightened within the *Remembering* Project, about how such poorly contextualized interpretations tend quite ceaselessly toward recognition of white virtue. But one final example is clearer still.

We were then taken to the plantation's kitchen, a separate building connected by a walkway to the adjacent owner's house. Here in a nearly empty, brick-walled room was a central table on which there lay the transcription of a letter, written by the enslaved cook (Hannah), to the Founding Father. Apparently, the "master" had become ill at his other residence and was unable to visit the house that season. Hannah lamented his absence in the letter, wished him a rapid return to good health, and complimenting him in a variety of ways, ended her letter, "adieu."

And there the interpretation ended, its full implication of a well-kept, literate servant, appreciative of an obviously kind master. Blakey, given discussions of resistance during the *Remembering* Project, asked the archaeologist guide, "Were there no runaway ads? Was there no evidence of resistance here?" To which the guide responded with a detailed story of Hannah's son, Billy. Billy was so incompatible with slavery that he once "ripped open" the overseer's face in violent resistance. Indeed, he was being considered by the Founding Father for the worst sort of punishment at the time Hannah wrote her letter. He would be whipped, but not as brutally as he would be over the next infarction, and by the third time, Billy was sold south to Louisiana: to hell. He resisted even there so much that he would be imprisoned and, although the prima facie evidence had yet to be found, circumstantial evidence pointed to the probability that Billy escaped in the end.

With this context, never before included in the tour, the former characterization of enslaved mothers as callous is called into question and the Founding Father is revealed as another abusive contributor to the system of slavery that generated his wealth. Hannah, an African mother, may have used whatever words or relationship she could use to dampen his wrath against her son. The kitchen example becomes another of the sometimes dance, sometimes wrestling match that marked slavery as a place of continuous resistance by the human beings who could not accept it. Chattel slavery was brutally inhumane and Billy was an example of the intolerable cruelty it produced. Our guide spoke of the endemic presence of runaways, self-liberated Africans around the plantation engaged in what the plantocracy considered to be crimes of theft and violence. "This," Blakey said, "is the story people need to hear." And it is possible that like comments of many white Virginians in our discussion, the archaeologist guide knew the unspoken story so well because it is actually a better story. The complexity of truth is a better story, albeit leaving to the Founding Father no greater virtue than for any human being wrestling with inhuman circumstances partly of his or her making.

Who "We" Are

European American participants in the *Remembering* Project pilot conversations did not speak directly to how the pervasiveness and centrality of European and European American historical figures and narratives formed their image of self and their place within the nation. However, European Americans used "we" and "us" to refer to themselves within collective identities of the state of Virginia and the United States. These references emerged most prominently in responses to the question, "How does discussing slavery make you feel?"

African Americans, in contrast, rarely used "we" or "us" to refer to collective identities as part of the state or nation, but frequently in reference to the experiences and histories of the enslaved, to collective ethnic identities as African Americans, to racial identities as "blacks," and to Diasporan identities as people of African descent. This may reflect ways in which learning

history socializes a sense of inclusion and exclusion within localities and the nation state. Salamishah Tillet (2012) refers to this sensibility among African Americans as “civic estrangement.” Tillet states,

“African Americans have not only had the unfortunate fate of existing outside of the founding narratives and selective visions for the American past that made up the ‘we’ in the American people, but are also subject to the continual repression of their economic and material contributions, ‘busily disavowed’ in and by civic myths.” (Tillet 2012: 8-9).

History narratives tell the stories of who “we” are and how we came to be “here.” Individual biographies intersect with collective historical processes. Individuals seek to connect themselves, their family histories, their heritages to the timelines and stories that are woven throughout national narratives. Participants in our statewide pilot Community Conversations (and in later programming) spoke to the role of history in signifying who “we” are as communities, and states, and as a nation. Relegation of African and African Diasporan experiences to narratives ancillary to World History and U.S. history convey histories of humanity through a lense of valorized constructions of whiteness. The absence of African American men, women, and children in historical site interpretations and the truncated distortions presented in public history text books were discussed by African American participants as painful learning experiences that negatively influenced their perceptions of self. These exclusions and misrepresentations also signify exclusion from full membership within the nation. African American participants’ discussions of struggles for full freedom are related to participant definitions of freedom as including full access to citizenship and full membership within the nation. These questions were raised in relationship to the significance of the Emancipation Proclamation for African Americans 150 years ago and contemporarily.

Modes of Commemoration and Central Themes

The need to learn, teach, and share complete U.S. and Virginia African American histories that include African American resistance to slavery and African American contributions to their nation were themes that resonated statewide among participants. Telling and representing a fuller “truth” in public histories, textbooks, and in schools were conveyed as necessary and restorative processes for Virginia and the United States.

Multiple modes of commemoration were appealing to Virginia residents, though a few regional variations emerged during the discussions. Storytelling, genealogy workshops, memorializing and documenting cemetery sites, community dialogues, tours, and musical performances were among commonly requested modes of commemoration. However, lectures, history and art exhibits, poetry readings, parades, theatrical presentations and reenactments, ecumenical and libation ceremonies at cemetery sites were also considered appealing and appropriate ways to reflect on the Emancipation Proclamation. The value of discussion and community conversations was brought up at multiple points during programming throughout the state. One African American man in the Central region commented, “the greatest commemoration is the dialogue between families and individuals.”

Conceptualizing commemorative activities as tied to the Sesquicentennial was problematic for some participants. A more generalized desire to institutionalize historical knowledge of African American histories was expressed along with the need for complete educational curricula that teach fully humanized and complex African American history narratives as a mainstream component of World History, U.S. History, and Virginia History. Annual activities that provide opportunities to learn, reflect on, discuss and celebrate African American history and heritage at various points throughout each year (including but not limited to yearly anniversaries of Black History Month, Juneteenth, Emancipation Day, and Watch Night) were discussed, and not solely for the Sesquicentennial. One woman in the Coastal region voiced concern that, just as Emancipation Day celebrations had been lost in the contemporary living memory; it would become lost again if the significance is only highlighted for one commemorative period.

Statewide themes that emerged in the discussion programs and in written responses:

African American history is not bounded by the histories of slavery and emancipation.

African American history includes ancient African history and a long struggle for freedom, social justice, and equality in the United States that continues today.

African Americans achieved their freedoms through multiple modes of resistance and self-liberation. Resistance against racism, injustice, and oppression is still ongoing and freedom is not yet fully attained.

The Emancipation Proclamation was a strategic and limited document that did not “give” freedom to the enslaved. Educational resources are needed for learning more about this history.

Dialogue is needed that focuses on slavery, and racism as a legacy of slavery. Such dialogue fosters social and individual healing processes. Discussions ideally involve exposing and correcting historical omissions and distortions, confronting white privilege and denial that is perpetuated by Eurocentric and racist lenses on the past, as well as repairing distorted perceptions of self among African Americans.

Educational texts and public histories need to engage a complete narrative of slavery that includes African American resistance as well as the full atrocities committed against enslaved African Americans by European American enslavers and slaveholders. Telling the full histories of enslaved men, women, and children recognizes their humanity and restores dignity to their memory, honoring their roles in the creating the nation.

Storytelling in historic spaces is a powerful tool for transformational learning. Learning about the lives of past peoples and events in the physical spaces of historic sites is a particularly thought-provoking experience that connects past and present spaces, places, lives, and histories.

A desire to **engage the lingering question regarding whether or not slavery was the cause of the Civil War.** Even European American participants who questioned the role of slavery as a main cause for the Civil War seemed open to learn more and have the questions addressed in educational settings.

African American families are living legacies of resistance against slavery. Family histories connect individual biographies to larger historical processes. Family stories connect the past to the present in personal ways that appeal to broad audiences and age ranges.

Younger generations of African Americans need to learn the history of slavery and resistance as significant to their contemporary experiences and their futures. Racism and injustice experienced by African American participants and their younger family members were seen as direct legacies of slavery. Ongoing achievements in social justice and equality were directly connected to the legacies of resistance against oppression exemplified by personal and community ancestors who fought slavery on a daily basis and in a myriad of ways. Education was seen as a way to strengthen young African Americans in building a better future for themselves by learning from their ancestors and from the past.

European Americans need and desire to learn African American histories and culture from African American perspectives. Eurocentric and racist educational perspectives and historical interpretations have conveyed a distorted and inaccurate version of the American and Virginian past that fosters negative, racially coded perspectives and cultural ignorance. European American centrality in American history narratives perpetuates a sense of entitlement and obscures white privilege, rendering those Americans half-blind and ill-equipped to understand the world in which they live.

Regionally Specific Modes of Commemoration

A need for continued dialogue was expressed statewide within several different contexts. This need resonates throughout the regionally specific themes.

In the Northern and Central regions, participants specifically discussed a need for **community healing conversations** among African Americans and European Americans focused on addressing legacies of slavery and racism.

A desire to learn more about African American resistance to slavery was a statewide theme, however, participants in the Central, Coastal, and Southwest region wanted to **learn about and honor acts of resistance as heroic**. Participants referenced learning about European and European American leaders, usually men, who fought in battles like the American War of Independence and were presented as “heroes” to students. Limited education on African American resistance to slavery was provided, and was often presented in a negative or pathological context (Nat Turner was a frequent example). Participants wanted to learn about and honor the daily modes of resistance as equally heroic as the revolutionary forms of resistance.

Participants spoke to the lack of interpretation of the African American presence and histories at historic sites. In the Valley, Central, and Northern regions, **educating and training docents, tour guides and historical interpreters to engage the difficult questions surrounding slavery and racism** was presented as a specific need. History interpreters, docents, and tour guides need a forum where they can feel comfortable discussing the challenges of their work and gain guidance from experienced professionals who have successfully navigated public history interpretations in a respectful, engaged, and incisive way.

Participants in the Northern region wanted to **learn local histories** and how family histories articulated with these local, regional, and national histories.

Central region participants wanted to learn **a quantified value of the labor and capital provided by enslaved African and African Americans**. A desire to learn about **Emancipation celebrations throughout the Diaspora** was also expressed in this region.

Record, mark and care for cemeteries where men, women, and children who died enslaved are buried. Honor and commemorate their lives. This was specifically expressed in all regions, except the Southwest.

Program Implementation: Transformational Learning Experiences through Informed Community Dialogue and Processional History Telling

Programming activities that have proceeded from this engagement privileged the input of African descended community members and memorialized that presence. Learning from Virginia residents who do not identify as African descendants allowed us to consider how descendant community-led themes and programming could be designed to provide rich learning experiences for diverse audiences of Virginians and visitors to the Commonwealth. The project goals included planning events of remembrance that foreground African American contributions and the pervasive African and African American historical presence that remains within Virginia’s physical and social landscapes. An African American man in the Central region asked for “Transformative, Experiential, and interactive events that promote deep understanding and healing.” We felt that his words captured much of what residents throughout Virginia expressed that they wanted within the various modes of commemoration.

Drawing on the statewide and regional themes and modes of commemoration, the *Remembering* Project staff developed programming and grant proposals with the guidance and participation of the team of Expert Advisors. The *Remembering* Project staff developed and

submitted grant proposals to the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) and the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities (VFH). An Open Grant and a Discretionary Grant were awarded by the VFH, but an Implementation Grant was not awarded by the NEH. The complete programming is listed below. Lectures were to be filmed and then viewed at 15 separate locations throughout the state, followed by in-person facilitated discussions. Only the original lecture descriptions are provided below (for complete program walk-through descriptions, please see copies of the grant proposals and final reports in Appendix 8 and, 9; event flyers can be seen in Appendix 10). Programs that did not take place due to lack of funding are noted.

Lecture and Discussion Programs

Sacred Space: Burial Places of the Enslaved and their Descendants

April 27, 2013, College of William and Mary

Presenters: Dr. Cassandra Newby-Alexander, Dr. Lynn Rainville
Discussant: Dr. Grey Gundaker and Dr. Hollis Pruitt

Moderator: Dr. Michael Blakey

Presentations on the historic and sacred significance of African American burial places were presented and discussed. An open dialogue followed.

This event was part of the NEH grant proposal, but was realized without NEH funding due to the generous support of our speakers, the MLK Commission, and the Institute for Historical Biology, and *Remembering* Project volunteers.

A DVD recording of this program was provided by the generosity of Dr. Shawn Utsey and Hassan Pitts and copies of the DVD are included with this report. The MLK Commission approved use of the remaining grant funds to reproduce the April 27, "Sacred Space" DVD.

Was the Civil War Fought Over Slavery?

Cemeteries and Remembering the Civil War and Emancipation Proclamation
(procession to and commemorative ceremony at the Richmond African Burial Ground)

Planned date: May 18, 2013, Richmond Convention Center, Richmond, Virginia

Planned Presenters: Dr. David Blight and Dr. Edna Medford

Planned Discussants: Dr. Newby-Alexander and Dr. Micki McElya

*This event did not take place due to lack of funding.

What Does Family Have to Do with It? Archives, Genealogies, and the African American Struggle for Freedom

Planned Presenters: Dr. Dianne Swann-Wright

Planned Discussants: Louis Hicks and Autumn Barrett

Planned Date: September 14, 2013 at the Afro-American Historical Association in Fauquier County

*This event did not take place due to lack of funding.

How Can We Talk About Such Things? Interpreting African American Cemeteries and Historic Sites (a commemorative ceremony at the "slave" cemetery of Montpelier to follow)

Planned Presenters: Dr. Whitney Battle-Baptiste, Dr. Rex Ellis, and Dr. Matthew Reeves

Planned Discussants: Dr. Matthew Reeves and Dr. Michael Blakey

Planned Date: November 9, 2013

*This event did not take place due to lack of funding.

Genealogy Workshops

Genealogy Workshop with Paula Royster

May 4, 2013, Swem Library, College of William and Mary

Paula Royster walked participants through resources available for conducting self-guided genealogical research. Ms. Royster shared her own journey in learning her family history and how these histories connect with broader historical narratives. Ms. Royster assisted each participant in using the records they brought with them to begin (or continue) their research during the workshop. Swem Library provided an introduction to the resources of the Special Collections archives.

This event was part of the proposed NEH grant proposal, but was realized without NEH funding due to the generous support of Paula Royster, the MLK Commission and the Institute for Historical Biology, and *Remembering* Project volunteers.

Genealogy Workshop with Paula Royster

Planned date: October 13, 2013 at the Afro-American Historical Society in Fauquier County, Virginia.

*This event did not take place due to lack of funding.

Community Conversations on African American Resistance to Slavery and Processional History Telling

Community Conversations were held in the Northern, Central, and Valley regions, combining the requests for continued dialogue, learning more about African American resistance, acknowledging the multiple modes of resistance against slavery as heroic, the power of storytelling and learning within historic spaces. Presentations on local acts and leaders of resistance were provided by community partners to foster informed and open dialogue, asking the question, "What makes a hero?" Conversations were planned in coordination with history telling processions. The following is a list of Conversations and Processional programs implemented in 2013 and 2014:

August 2, 2013: *Community Conversation on African American Resistance to Slavery in the Northern Region*

Key Presenter: Karen Hughes White, Executive Director of the Afro-American Historical Association of Fauquier County.

Following the lead of participants in the Northern region pilot conversations, Ms. Hughes White discussed how to utilize local archival records to learn how enslaved men and women resisted slavery on a daily and ongoing basis. Displaying excerpts from diaries, court documents, church records, newspapers, and letters, Ms. Hughes White told of poisoning; women putting ground glass in their enslavers' food; clandestine meetings where enslaved men and women taught each other to read and write; men and women who became fugitives to create their freedom; members of the "contraband" movement who fled to Union lines; and a possible infanticide by a woman who went into labor while working in a corn field.

An open dialogue followed, facilitated by Michael Blakey.

August 3, 2013: *A Processional History Telling through Warren County*

The procession began at First Baptist Warrenton where Karen Hughes White told the story of the “Contraband” movement. This included the stories of Frank Baker, Sheppard Mallory, and James Townsend, the first enslaved men to seek freedom by crossing the Hampton Roads Harbor to enter the Union-held Fort Monroe in 1861. Descendants of local residents whose ancestors followed suit presented their families’ stories, drawing on church records of First Baptist Warrenton, Zion Baptist Church, and Mount Zion Church. Ms. White also brought historic etchings that showed extant houses where slaveholding families and enslaved laborers lived. Participants could see the changes and continuities of the physical landscape as discussions continued regarding the histories presented the day before and during the procession. The day concluded at Mount Zion Church, where a joint choir presented a musical concert in honor of the modes of resistance practiced by African Americans in and through their religious faith.

October 12, 2013: *A Community Conversation on African American Resistance to Slavery in Richmond*

Key Presenters: Ana Edwards, Chair, Sacred Ground Historical Reclamation Project
Pamela Bingham, Descendant of Gabriel and Bingham family historian
Maat Free, Guardian of Ancestral Remembrance and Founding Curator of the Beloved Unseen

Ana Edwards presented on Gabriel’s Rebellion and Mary Bowser, providing historical sketches and local sites associated with these two figures of African American resistance against slavery. Pamela Bingham presented on her family’s journey in learning their history through genealogical and historical research, and what the legacies of resistance mean for her and her family today.

An open dialogue followed, facilitated by Michael Blakey.

Maat Free concluded the program with a guided reflection, “Journey Through the Forest of Family Trees.”

A processional history telling through the Trail of Enslaved Africans was to follow, but due inclement weather, was rescheduled for April 26, 2014.

April 26, 2014: *In the Beginning... Virginia, Along the Trail of Enslaved Africans by Elegba Folklore Society*

Omilade Janine Bell and J. Ron Flemming led a processional interactive guided tour of the Trail of Enslaved Africans starting at Richmond’s Manchester Docks and continuing through downtown Richmond’s historic slave trading sites. The guided tour included historical re-enactment performances and storytelling while visiting downtown Richmond’s multiple sites associated with slavery and African American resistance to slavery. The day was concluded at the Richmond African Burial Ground with Maat Free’s presentation of “Journey Through the Forest of Family Trees” as a guided reflection.

June 21, 2014: A Celebration of Historic Josephine City, a History Telling Procession

Community partners Deborah Liggins and Dorothy Davis of the Josephine Improvement Association collaborated with multiple residents and descendants of Historic Josephine City to tell the stories of the founders, families, and legacies of Josephine City. A community day of celebration was planned for mid-June to honor the tradition of Juneteenth. Josephine was founded in 1870 when 23 formerly enslaved African Americans purchased 31 one-acre lots from Clermont Plantation to create an “oasis” for African Americans in Clarke County, Virginia. Josephine residents created their own water and energy supplies and had established two churches, a schoolhouse, a gas station, a grocery store, a slaughterhouse a hat-shop, a restaurant, a boarding house, and a cemetery by 1900.

Nearly 150 people attended the day’s activities, which began with the unveiling of a new Virginia historical marker providing the true story of the founding of the city. A walking tour of 20 sites along the original main street followed. Descendants of Josephine City families told the stories of each site, and shared what Josephine’s legacies of resistance against oppression has meant to them throughout their lives. The procession concluded with the unveiling of a second historical marker.

A Conversation on African American Legacies of Resistance followed the procession and was held at the Josephine School Community Museum and Clarke County African-American Cultural Center. Presentations made by Josephine City residents and preservation activists Dorothy Davis and Helen Carr highlighted Thomas Laws, an enslaved spy who provided crucial information to General Sherman that enabled the Union to claim victory at the Battle of Winchester on September 19, 1864. Free and enslaved figures of resistance were presented, referencing local archival records. Ms. Davis told the stories of Juliette, an enslaved woman who sued her enslavers to gain her freedom, and of Morgan Coxen, an enslaved man who sold supplies to the Union army while his enslaver was absent from the plantation. Ms. Davis recounted the works of Martin R. Delaney, reminding the audience that he was born less than 15 miles away from Berryville. An open discussion followed, facilitated by Michael Blakey.

The programming was concluded with a commemorative “flower strewing” at the Milton Valley Cemetery. In the 1900s, Josephine City hosted “Cemetery Walks” and “Flower Strewing” ceremonies to commemorate those interred by placing flowers on the graves.

Community Inter-Racial Healing Conversations

September 7, 2013, October 26, 2013, and January 18, 2014

A series of three inter-racial healing conversations were held at the Afro-American Historical Association of Fauquier County. Art Carter and Phoebe Kilby of Coming to the Table facilitated each of the three discussions. Coming to the Table specializes in facilitating racial healing through dialogue. The organization began by bringing together descendants of enslavers and the enslaved to talk about these painful histories. In the Fauquier County Community Inter-Racial Healing Conversation Series, the legacies of slavery and racism were discussed in confidence, following guidelines agreed upon by the participants.

A full walk-through description and flyers of these programs can be found in Appendix 8 and 9.

Informed Dialogues at the College of William and Mary

November 6, 2014: *Created Equal – Slavery by Another Name*, at the College of William and Mary (a collaboration with the VFH, partially funded by an NEH grant awarded to the VFH)

Co-sponsored by the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities in collaboration with Virginia Africana and the IHB's *Remembering* Project, this two-part public forum spanned most of the day at two locations on the College of William and Mary campus. The program also served as a pre-conference event offered in coordination with the 2014 Virginia Africana Conference to be held the next day at Colonial Williamsburg's Bruton Heights Education Center.

More than 90 participants attended either one or both of the day's programs, which were free and open to the public. The morning program began with the presentation of "Slavery by Another Name," the 2012 PBS documentary film based on the 2009 Pulitzer Prize-winning book, *Slavery by Another Name: The Re-Enslavement of Black Americans from the Civil War to World War II* by Douglas A. Blackmon. The film, which examines the re-establishment of peonage, resource removal, and civil rights limitations for African Americans under government policies adhering to the notion of "separate but equal" racial groups in the United States, was followed by a highly participatory conversation on the relevance of the film to occurrences in today's society.

The afternoon program encompassed two panels. One panel reviewed the legacies of slavery and Jim Crow racism at the College of William and Mary and in the creation of Colonial Williamsburg, with presentations by Professors Jody Allen, Anne Charity Hudley, and Terry Meyers. A second panel addressed Charles Corner and the Yorktown area as Jim Crow racism affected black communities in the process of appropriating space for the Naval Weapons Station and the National Parks. Shannon Mahoney discussed her work with the Charles Corner community, and Edith Heard and Sherman Hill shared their experiences as local historians and Charles Corner descendants.

February 27, 2015: *A Campus Community Conversation on the Legacies of Slavery, Resistance, and Freedom* at the College of William and Mary (not funded by grant monies)

Undergraduate research assistants Edith Amponsah, Meg Osborne, and Daniella Mensah Abrampah proposed that the *Remembering* Project hold a Community Conversation for students at the College of William and Mary. The discussion sought to reflect on the College of William and Mary as an historic site associated with slavery, asking how students experience legacies of slavery and resistance on campus.

Henry Broaddus, as former Dean of Admissions, addressed the perceptions and realities of affirmative action as practiced at the college. Michael Blakey presented on contemporary discourse around and expressions of racism in the United States. Josue Nieves, Travis Harris, and Edith Amponsah presented examples of local and on-line dialogues on race, racism and social justice movements. An open and confidential dialogue followed these presentations.

Surveys allowing students to respond to the questions provided to participants in the pilot Community Conversation series are being distributed to gain insight into how William and Mary students think and feel about remembering slavery and emancipation.

(Please see Appendix 11 for flyers of both these events.)

Conclusions

The pilot series of Community Conversations affirmed that Virginia remains in need of complex public histories of slavery and the enslaved to reflect the richness of lived experiences. Too often when slavery is discussed as the primary window onto the African American past, the enslaved are rendered as one-dimensional servants or compliant chattel unworthy of recognition for the benefits of their work. Such under-informed and skewed interpretations perpetuate historically false representations of African Americans in the past, serving to denigrate and flatten the brilliance of their histories for all Virginians. This dehumanization can be countered through careful accounts of African and African American resilience, lives beyond their labors, resistance to oppression. Critically, this includes examination of enslaved people's own efforts to honor their pasts, cultures, lives and afterlives through burial practices and memorializing the dead.

As participants in the statewide Community Conversations attested to, the bounding of African American histories within the temporal period and experiences of slavery is artificial, inaccurate, and belies the full trajectory of African American experiences. Punctuating the Community Conversations is the paradox in historical valorization of European American identities and constructions of "whiteness" at the expense of historical representations of African humanity, distortions of "blackness," and silencing of African Diasporan contributions to creating the "modern" world. The paradox is exacerbated by the histories of African and African descendant contributions while suffering under and resisting against the inhumane actions and ideologies of Europeans and their descendants.

The commemorative Sesquicentennial of the Emancipation Proclamation and the end of slavery in the United States has been an opportune period to critically reflect on and discuss the history of slavery, African American resistance to slavery, and self-determined freedom struggles. The *Remembering* Project has sought to assist in presenting a fuller, multidimensional understanding of "slaves" as complete persons who recognized and asserted their own humanity in their daily lives. Participants desired memorialization and education of African American histories that extend beyond a commemorative moment, but remain ongoing and pervasive.

We are hopeful that the findings of this pilot research project and the successes of resultant programming will encourage ongoing critical, reflective, and engaging commemorations and interpretations of slavery, resistance, and freedom, beyond the Sesquicentennial anniversaries of the Emancipation Proclamation and the Civil War. History narratives, representations, and commemorations signify inclusions and exclusions in constructing who "we" are as communities that make up cities, states, and the nation. We learned that history telling has the power to create positive (and negative) personal and social transformations. While we learned that histories of slavery evoke conflicting emotions for Virginians of European and African descent, we also learned that many Virginia residents are ready to engage the past, unafraid of the complete story, in order to build a positive, vitally inclusive future.

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