

REMEMBERING

Slavery, Resistance, and Freedom

PROJECT



a partnership of the
College of William & Mary and the
Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial Commission

0184-21. EMANCIPATION DAY, RICHMOND, VA.

The *Remembering* Project

- Sesquicentennial Commemoration of the Emancipation Proclamation
- Developed as a partnership between the MLK Commission, William and Mary, and the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities
 - October 2010 : conceptual proposal accepted by the MLK Commission
 - December 2010: IHB charged with leading and housing the Project
 - Project invited 12 Expert Advisors specializing in aspects of African American life, history, memory, and memorialization

Cemetery Database

- **Create a database of Virginia cemeteries** where those who died enslaved are interred.
- cemetery database (Appendix 3)
- combination of documentary research and individual submissions
 - 804 entries representing 60 counties/ cities
 - ongoing local initiatives and collaborations

Pilot Program

November 2011 - July 2012

- Eight Community Conversations Virginia's five regions
 - Northern
 - Central
 - Coastal
 - Valley
 - Southwest
- Collaborations with *Remembering* Project Expert Advisors and community-based organizations



Funding

Cash:

- MLK Commission - \$15,000
- William and Mary - \$11,000
- IHB - \$14,979

In-kind:

- IHB & RSRFP - \$34,990

- Learn the themes and modes of commemoration most resonant for African Americans in Virginia
- model of community engagement
 - NYABG Project

Demography

- 172 participants, 147 provided demographic information
- Almost 2/3 identified as women, 1/3 as men
- About 60% identified as African Americans
- About 1/3 identified as European descendants
- About 5% identified as descendants of Africans, and/ or Native Americans, and Europeans
- A few participants were born and raised outside of the United States, but currently lived in Virginia.
- Over 80% were educated beyond high school
- 18.4% were active or retired educators
- 8.2% worked in historical or cultural organizations
- Among those who shared where they grew up or were educated - 62% in Virginia

- Statewide and Regional themes emerged during the regional meetings of November 2011 - July 2012
- Findings guided subsequent programs implemented between April 2013 - 2015
 - VFH Discretionary and Open Grants - \$6,200
 - In-kind and matching contributions from IHB, William & Mary, community-based partners - \$45,110
- Preliminary reports on progress and findings provided to the MLK
- Final report includes analysis based on intensive content analysis of written and oral transcripts

Highlights: Statewide Themes

- ***Storytelling in historic spaces is a powerful tool for transformational learning.***
- ***Connecting past and present*** spaces, places, lives, and histories.
- good way of engaging younger generations
- Multiple forms of commemoration should be ongoing - beyond the sesquicentennial

Statewide Themes: Emancipation

- African American history is not bounded by the histories of slavery and emancipation.
- The Emancipation Proclamation is most generally viewed by all participants as a ***strategic and limited document***.
- African Americans ***achieved*** their freedoms through multiple modes of resistance and self-liberation.
 - freedom was not “given”

- African American participants 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.”
- ***African Americans are still fighting for full freedom and social justice.***
- For some participants, slavery still exists “in different forms”.

Who “we” are

- African American participants' discussions of struggles for full freedom were related to their definitions of freedom as including full access to citizenship and full membership within the nation.
- Questions regarding rights and citizenship arose in discussing the significance of the Emancipation Proclamation 150 years ago and contemporarily.

Salamishah Tillet's *Sites of Slavery: Citizenship, Racial Democracy, and the Post-Civil Rights Imagination* (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.”

(Tillett 2012: 8-9)