

Note: *There were so many insightful and eloquent reflections from this summer's Crafting Freedom participants that it was very hard to choose which ones to post on the website. We left out many wonderful ones, but only because we felt a 40-page document would be a bit much to plow through! We hope that this is a pretty representative sample. See a final "parting note" at the end.*

*Laurel and Charlie Sneed
The Thomas Day Education Project*

Selected Reflections 2006 - June Group

"...Dead words on paper vs. "a cloud of witness"..."

As a lifetime lover of history I am always saddened when someone tells me "History is boring." That individual has never experienced anything like the events of this week.

That individual's perception of history has been formed by dead words on paper, not what the Bible calls a "cloud of witness."

The witness of a young 19th century girl writing to her mother about dresses. How like my 21st century daughter the "witness" of a plane mark on a barn beam.

What thoughts went through the maker's head as he worked? I ran my hand over that mark almost the whole time the docent spoke, The "witness" of the simple elegance of Day's furniture

Through his furniture Day leaves a message passed down through the years: **"I endured, I contributed, I excelled."** Isn't that what it's all about?

"My education about the history of slavery was woefully inadequate and focused on the big house..."

Crafting Freedom has been a awesome experience - everything about it has been as near perfect as I can imagine. The very best part of the program is the people who make up the network of experts that support this project. They are the most genuine, generous, passionate people who create this incredible learning environment.

I am a long-time researcher and user of primary documents, but this week I have come to see that I have been less than upfront about the African American experience in our nation's history. And worse, that as my Southern upbringing has taught me, that I have continued to teach a narrow, stereotypical, one-dimensional look at the dreadful business of owning humans. This workshop has certainly opened doors to opportunities to examine the complexity and variety within the African American community.

I think my education about the history of slavery was woefully inadequate and focused on the "big house."

No one has ever taken me to task over my beliefs or presentation

of African-American history, possibly because I have not black students and there are few African Americans in our county. But it now seems to me that my role is more important in teaching skills for finding the "truth." I'm rethinking my position and will change not only my attitude but also my curriculum as a result of Crafting Freedom.

I'd like to also note that the participants in this particular session were wonderful - everyone was friendly, helpful, and respectful. My stay here has been fabulous - the food, the hotel, our location, the materials, the Schedule - I've never been to a more productive, stress free workshop I can only hope there will be another one in my future.

"I think about the tradition of leaving your mark, the presentism of history, and my place, if any, in that landscape."

It's hard for me to say that I enjoyed this workshop because the word "enjoy" lacks the dimension of the feelings, observations, and thoughts (complete and incomplete) that have yet had time to find themselves or their grounding. Instead I have to submit to saying that I appreciate having had the opportunities to meet new ancestors, exchange ideas with veteran teachers, explore and satiate my quest/thirst, yearning for knowledge.

Questions of "why?" have led to more questions about myself, my world, and my future as a teacher and a scholar. One of the more concrete learning skills that I will take with me is understanding the abundance of, necessity of, and how to gain access to primary sources. It's weird. I look at furniture in a completely different way now. I think initially of Thomas Day, but on another level, I think about the tradition of leaving your mark, the presentism of history, and my place, if any, in that landscape.

The retreat facility, being tucked away in a beautiful place --- quiet --- allowed me to catch myself. This has been my first year teaching and I have been doing summer school. Basically, I haven't had a moment to catch myself, spiritually, personally, or intellectually.

The themes of the workshop, nature of discourse, and the conversations that I had allowed me this:

I go back to (my city) today a little bit more resolved and clearer about my personal, educational, and philosophical objectives as it relates to transmitting the history of Africans in American to my students, my colleagues, and those who are willing to listen.

"...Teachers such as myself have had to self-educate themselves in African American history due to it's M.I.A. status in out history books..."

History is there, it's always been there and it continues to build upon itself as dust collects upon tales, every day documents turn into historical artifacts and anonymity seems to dissolve the lives of the people

Who empowered America as America brutally betrayed their inalienable rights to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."

In the workshop I've been exposed to people who are dusting off the tales, reading historical documents, and seeking and celebrating the repressed identities, lives, passions, crafts and loves .

The work taking place in the academic world as history is restored is being passed on to a generation of teachers, such as myself, who have had to self-educate themselves in African-American history due to its M.I. A. status in our history books.

I now have more ideas about how to aid my students in getting a more concrete picture of American History using actual documents, taking field trips, watching powerpoints, and generally seeking out and listening to all of the voices of our past. I have more ways to help the teachers in my school desegregate history - so they don't just teach African American History in February - but all year.

I myself feel this workshop has dusted off and opened doors to that which was here, I just needed to take the time to get back to it.

"I have been over and over amazed at how much information has been lost and has to be rediscovered..."

This workshop has made me more open to looking below the surface of history and to realize that history is not the very general outline that bores many, but full of interlocking stores and personalities and also personal agendas of people. This truly has demonstrated how we can not only learn "about" history but also "from" history.

Also, I have been over and over amazed at how much information has been lost and has to be rediscovered. I think I understand how important accurate record-keeping and "journaling" is now. I will definitely be more conscious of using primary sources.

I think I will be much more effective in teaching my students about history and how to become researchers themselves. Thank you for this opportunity. I have not only learned, I have been inspired.

I have been uninformed, ill-informed or unaware...I must do something with this information. My challenge is "What?"

Through the last five days, I have learned a myriad of lessons; even as I write this I am attempting to process each/all of them. One thing that I have begun to learn is that as a white Caucasian here in America, I have a responsibility. I must purposely as well as intentionally do my part to actively seek out a way to break barriers and build bridges of honesty and understanding.

I do not believe that I have been "sheltered", I do believe that I have been uninformed, ill-informed or unaware. After having been informed... after having the "covers" pulled back a bit... I must do

something with this information. My challenge is "What"?! I can bask in the enlightenment of the experience we have shared here, yet I go back to the land of everyday reality. Whatever the "what" might be, I know it will be TRUE, it will be TRANSPARENT, and it will be something that will further TRANSFORM myself (and others.) This will be quite an exciting adventure.

"I have read scores of books and articles on the subject of slavery, but never quite understood it until this workshop."

To spend the entire week in the company of the TDEP faculty and facilities was positively inspirational. Ken Grady is a gifted communicator and presenter whom I instantly liked. Ditto for Beverly McNeill, a Teacher's Teacher, if there ever was one. They were both indispensable to the outstanding success of the seminar. Rhonda was simply amazing - though I have read Sojourner Truth's speech many times, I have never really felt it until her reading. Chubb's Miles and Twinkle Graves are national treasures.

Laurel and Charlie Sneed - the dynamic duo - are brilliant strategists and organizers, but most importantly they are truly master teachers, always remaining focused on their objectives. Perhaps more importantly, they are active listeners, a rare quality among educators. I remain in debt.

I have read scores of books and articles on the subject of slavery, but never quite understood it until this workshop.

There is much I have to learn. Thank you for an outstanding experience!

"Why not just find primary sources?"

It was wonderful being at the sites where Thomas Day and Elizabeth Keckly worked and lived. I learned more about the complexity, about the South. Before this workshop, I felt from my own limited experience with Southerners that all of the South was still fighting the Civil War.

I feel I can begin to use more primary sources. I've told my students about some of the limitations of such search engines as Google which leads to sources often not well documented, validated or put into any kind of order. Why not just find the original sources?

Also I really would like to spend more time in North Carolina and keep in contact with many of the people I've met.

"Who will speak for those who have no voice?...Our job is to tell the stories."

The week's over and how do I feel? Sad, mad, and also uplifted. Thomas and Elizabeth's story has left me with lots of unanswered questions about the way I was taught and what I must include in my lessons. Let's be honest: I have observed many teachers teaching only the battles and leaving out the stories of the people. Who will speak for those who have

no voice? Check out the history books, and ask yourself what's left out? Our job is to tell the stories.

This workshop has given me a wealth of information and resources that will be shared with my colleagues. It's been great to share new ways to include primary source documents in my lessons. I do have one reservation about the heavy reliance on primary sources and that is that oral traditions will be ignored.

Chubb's story was about as real as it can get, yet, her honest and strength just radiates throughout the room. Her stories and songs were inspirations. The inclusion of all the performances really balanced the workshops. It was a great combination of reading, sharing, museums, and actors.

"History is about human beings searching, finding, and determining identities..."

The past 5 days have helped me organize some of my conflicting thoughts and emotions connected with reading painful aspects of history. It's ok if emotions surfaces - deal with the painful aspects openly. Admit and allow that viewpoints differ.

1) "Race" in America is a piece of the puzzle, not the puzzle. Put it in perspective without diminishing its importance,

2) History is about human beings searching, finding, and determining their identities (thank you Dr. Holland!) My students and I can do that together using lots of resources, techniques, and ideas I have collected over the past five days and beyond.

Vocabulary: Plantation = African American Forced Labor Camp

"Understanding the power and paradox of history..."

The Crafting Freedom workshop was a valuable learning experience for several reasons. It re-emphasized the importance of a sense of place in culture and society. Moreover, it will allow me to develop teaching activities on individuals such as Thomas Day and Elizabeth Keckly. These unique and important "hidden individuals" illuminate the history of the United States from a very different perspective (both for me and eventually for my students.)

One of the themes that I try to expose my students to in the classroom involves an understanding of both the **power** and **paradox** of history. Day and Keckly's stories provide new ways to approach both of these views. Their lives also tie into a very fundamental historical issue - periodization.

By asking how and why we label persons, by examining how things Change or how they remain the same, the lives of free black artisans open up rich new ways to examine history. Overall, the workshop exceeded my expectations. It definitely sustained my passion for history.

" By personalizing just a few of the millions of experiences in our past, I can take important ideas and beliefs into the future. "

This experience has been interesting, meaningful, and relevant to me professionally and personally. The opportunity to see and touch and feel history has given me the knowledge to confidently delve into the sometimes intimidating topic of African American history with my students. Thomas Day and Elizabeth Keckly are amazing characters and I am reminded that it is not just African- American history, but American history that we are studying. By personalizing just a few of the millions of experiences in our past, I can take important ideas and beliefs into the future.

"TDEP has brought these issues to light with respect, frankness, and honesty"

The workshop experience has changed me individually - as a Southerner, the issues of slavery and race relations have been complex and full of emotion. The Thomas Day Education Project has brought these issues to light with respect, frankness, and honesty. I have learned new information - astounding facts - where have they been hiding all these years? I have gained new perspectives on the history of our country and the experiences of fellow Americans.

Professionally, I will share the information with my teachers, order new materials for our media center, and work with my students to pass it on. I will continue to study, read, and reflect on what it means to "be free" today and how the longing for freedom inspires humans to do remarkable things - thanks.

"Everything is relevant to the Now..."

Wow !!!!

Each day is a journey into the past, but yet with an empowering present. Everything is relevant to the Now. Just when you think you can't take anymore information in, the next adventure is off and running. It is inspiring, motivating, uplifting, enlightening and very much necessary. I laughed, I cried. It is so much worth any sacrifice, just to be a part.

"One person's research... resulted in being a change agent for so many people..."

This workshop is a remarkable example of how one person's research and historical curiosity resulted in being a "change agent" for so many people.

One of the main components of this program that was greatly appreciated was the aspect of refreshing myself on a professional basis -

not just to see history as a list of facts which tends to objectify episodes from the past. It is important that history is used as a social construct to become a transformative power that enhances popular culture to be at its height, rather than to accept the status quo.

Reflections 2006 - July Group

"This workshop will resonate with me for many years to come..."

The workshop was densely packed with activities and subject matter and to be honest I'm still trying to sort it all out. I mean this in a good way because all of what we did was very helpful in making me a better-informed teacher.

My suspicion is that this workshop will resonate with me for many years to come and the material and methods I've learned here will enhance my teaching in all my classes.

I've made a few new friends at the workshop and hope to stay in touch for a long time.

This workshop has planted a seed in me. A seed that I think will grow and propagate more seeds in my students. It was a wonderful and profound workshop.

"...This workshop has armed me with peaceful weapons of mass instruction..."

The workshop has already had a powerful impact on me. I am sure that after I get back home and have had time to assimilate everything I have heard, seen, touched and felt, it will really sink in about what a rare opportunity I have been given. To hear noted and admired scholars, to meet dedicated teachers from all over the country, to actually visit all the places I have - and have not before - heard of- to drink all of this in and absorb it into my soul, mind and heart has been a privilege.

This workshop has armed with "peaceful weapons of mass instruction" to help in the effort to build bridges of tolerance and understanding for my students, faculty, and community. I am absolutely thrilled about going back home with all the knowledge I have learned here and ready to study and learn more. It is my vision to use this knowledge about the use of primary sources as a teaching tool to create a program for my students to begin creating documentaries about local history - particularly, African American history. North Carolina is a fabulous historical classroom, but I realize now that every town, city, state - indeed, every family - has a history and stories that need to be told. This workshop has given us a vision of how these dreams can be accomplished.

"Like the 'balm in Gilead' I leave here feeling 'no ways tired'..."

These days as part of this workshop have changed what I want to do professionally. I came here as a school librarian wanting to share the information with my classes. Now, I want to become a performer who brings the life of these people to live and directly talk to kids of different ages and they will not only be able see and hear the person, but also ask questions. I am going to begin researching my persons and locate a grant to initially begin in my local school district. Thank You for lighting the fire.

Coming here and having this experience has changed my life. From the moment I saw the notice on my school's bulletin board I knew this was going to be an unforgettable experience if I was fortunate enough to be accepted. Not only had TDEP fulfilled my original expectations, it has surpassed anything I could have imagined. History - affirming - yes; culturally rich - definitely; empowering, by all means. This will forever be the epiphany for me. The knowledge that through this experience (was) re-inforced (has been that) not only is our history important, the exclusion of it relevant and in need of being orally shared via primary sources; but most importantly shared with our youth however and whenever we who have had this experience can do so. One American History with all cultures. This has been empowering in that there is much to do and through this experience like the "Balm of Gilead" I leave here being "no ways tired." Bless you all for your magnificent work. Safe Journey!

"I feel I have gained 50 new mentors with many years of experience and strategies to share...This was a once in a lifetime opportunity to experience history firsthand. "

Professionally, I am now prepared to enlighten my children on the aspects of important North Carolinians that were African-Americans. This workshop has given me primary sources that I never knew I had before to make this subject interesting and engaging. As an individual, I feel I have gained 50 new mentors with many years of experience and strategies to share. This will be information that can be implemented all through the year and in every subject. Children will benefit from the obvious hard work of the Thomas Day Education Project.

The workshop has provided me with a wonderful opportunity to learn about a rich heritage that has been hidden for so long. It was so great to be able to learn and to grow from each other and to be able to take this knowledge back into my school and share it with my students. This was a once in a lifetime opportunity to experience history firsthand. I am so thankful for all that I've learned and I intend to use these resources to increase my awareness of black history.

" The future does hold out hope and redemption for the place of the black experience..."

The few short days I've spent with Thomas Day and Elizabeth Keckly have generated intellectual growth seasoned with personal emotions of grief, anger, compassion, humility, and strength. The final ingredient, the yeast of faith, will undoubtedly give rise to a palatable offering worthy of the scholarship and passion of TDEP. I fully expect that the offering will provide nourishment not only for my students but for my colleagues as well. The future does hold out hope and redemption for the place of the black experience and contributions (by blacks) to US history.

"It will no longer be a 28 day theme, but will have a place in daily learning."

Crafting Freedom was phenomenal. I never knew the richness behind African American History. This history can and will be integrated within all subject areas. It will no longer be a 28 day theme, but will have a place within daily learning. I am on a mission to empower, enrich and entreat all cultures with African American Culture. I also plan on implementing primary sources. One of my first activities will be embossing tombstones within our local community . I hope to assist those whom I encounter to find Day and Keckly within themselves by looking back into the past and bulidng the future. Sankofa.

"...I didn't anticipate the rich information other participants in the workshop would share about their own personal histories..."

Crafting Freedom has been an amazing learning experience! It has been wonderful to be among educators who actively strive for and search out new learning experiences that not only inform and enhance their teaching but also make them better individuals. I learned so many incredible things that I didn't know before about the history of our country and about the lives of free blacks and slaves during the antebellum period from the workshop scholars, site visits and readings. But I didn't anticipate the rich information other participants in the workshop would share about their own personal histories.

I would recommend this workshop to any individual who wants to learn about the hidden history of America , to have a better understanding of his/her context in present day America, and to be an active participant in changing students' understanding of it.

"I drew parallels between the plight of sharecroppers and the plight of many of the Latinos in my community..."

This has made me better understand Americans' common history. The story of slavery isn't just the story of African-Americans. It is the story of America.

The idea of presentism made me start thinking of today/contemporary times/ issues. And I drew parallels between the plight of sharecroppers and the plight of many of the Latinos in my community. Again - common experience.

"It was painful to glare at the inhumanity of slavery, but completely redemptive to look at it as my history too since I am an American..."

Black artisans, craftspeople, entrepreneurs and cabinetmakers never occurred in the same sentence with slavery in any of my previous education. It was painful to glare at the inhumanity of slavery, but completely redemptive to look at it as my history too since I am an American and look at all the resourcefulness and skill that was a part of the lives of the enslaved. Thank you for that.

I find life in (my city) to be framed by race in politics, religion, education, economics and it is oppressive. The best response that I can think of is to be educated, and to become a resource for my students and continue to let go of my own agenda. I so appreciated Dr. Hildebrande's comments. It was balanced and informed. I also liked Dr. Wood and Dr. Walker. Dr. Walker's thoughts and opinions were straightforward, strong and provocative. I like that.

It is also obvious that Lizzie Keckly was an admirable person who endured so much pain and yet rose above it. There is so much integrity displayed by a person such as Lizzie Keckly that transcends color, and yet is framed by her color. I do get confused by comments such as those by Dr. Ware who questions how Keckly could return to embrace her white family. I see Keckly doing something that so many of us today have a difficult time doing - forgiving one another. Keckly better than most transcends and embraces her past, race, gender, and pain in such a beautifully dignified way that I not only respect her but hold her as a role model for myself.

"This workshop uncovered some parts of the puzzle, but I realize that it is just the tip of the iceberg..."

The Thomas Day Education Project has proven to be phenomenal. Every facet of the past five days has served as a source of enlightenment. As a result of the exposure to a wealth of information about slavery, the targeted African-American artisans and others, as well as other pertinent information, the workshop has triggered a spark of inquiry as well as a desire to "spread the word." I have a great desire to

search my ancestral roots to uncover my own family's genealogy. Also, there's a burning desire down on the inside of me to increase my knowledge base about many African-American contributions to American history across the board. This workshop uncovered some parts of the puzzle, but I realize that it is just the tip of the iceberg. I was reminded of the richness of our cultural heritage as a result of being afforded this extraordinary opportunity. For this I am sincerely grateful!

"I was most impressed by the fact that a multi-cultural group of people worked so well together and were well-versed in their areas of expertise. No one was intimidated by anyone..."

The days were full of power packed information. I was in awe at the amount of time, effort and resources that went into this project. The whites who were involved treated everyone like family and so did the blacks. Every person who was involved with the program knew what they were supposed to do and were quite friendly and readily availed themselves to the participants' needs.

As we continued our experience with the project I was most impressed by the fact that a multi-cultural group of people worked so well together and were well versed in their areas of expertise. No one was intimidated by anyone. All of that professionalism inspired me to return home and study the primary sources I have and do a background on my family history.

" We are all leaving with a deeper understanding and appreciation of human will, sacrifice and the age-old problems of humankind."

The workshop ranks among the most memorable educational experiences in my academic career. Beyond making new lifelong friends, visiting historic sites or individual/group discussions the Crafting Freedom workshop opened long forgotten memories of growing up in the South. The majority of these fleeting images are happy and filled with love and ever changing landscapes. However, there were dark memories that had been carefully wrapped and stored.

I wanted to share these images of hate, but the pain it caused on multiple levels was too intense. As a witness and victim of the era, I too made a decision to block this dark realm from my daily existence. Perhaps someday I will find a means to share this aspect of Southern life in my generation with others.

The power and depth of the human experience presented has changed each participant. We are all leaving with a deeper understanding and appreciation of human will, sacrifice and the age-old problems of humankind.

If each of us can touch one life and a chain is constructed one link at a time, our message will make a difference in understanding the

importance of these brave individuals who helped craft freedom for future generations.

"Today I am proud to be African American"

This workshop has been enriching in many ways professionally and personally.

Like many North Carolinians, I had never heard of Thomas Day. When I was a child I wished to have been born White because it seemed that Black people had no hope. There was nothing positive to be said about being African American, but today I know better and I hope to educate Black and White that there is more to us. Today I am proud to be African-American and that it took the slave ships to get us here because it was ordained by God.

"Every event, lecture, tour and experience was not only extremely well planned and well organized, but it was also interesting, emotional, exciting, creative, interactive and informative..."

I can truly say this has been a wonderful experience for me. Every person involved in creating the Thomas Day Education Project has a passion not just for African-American history, but for bringing this history alive in our eyes, so we can make it alive for others. We as educators have been enlightened on a variety of topics not only of Thomas Day and Elizabeth Keckly, but extensive research on Harriet Jacobs, Nat Turner, and slavery from all aspects during the antebellum period - just to name a few.

Every event, lecture, tour and experience was not only extremely well planned and well organized, but it was also interesting, emotional, exciting, creative, interactive and informative. I will recommend this project and any future workshops associated with this project to all of my colleagues and do my best to educate my students in all that I have learned and then some. Thanks so much. What you are doing is heart-warming and your dedication and commitment to this endeavor is a true blessing and tribute to our lives.

"Thank you for this life-changing opportunity..."

I know that morally I had to further educate myself in order to better educate all of my students at a greater level. I am leaving here thrilled to get to work on my own to build a fun, hands-on, memorable and moving unit for my fourth graders. I wish only that I had this kind of excitement and motivation for all I have the blessing to teach. Professionally, it has been wonderful to immerse myself with others who feel they are equally charged with making a difference. I cannot wait to pass this knowledge and enthusiasm on to my students and their parents, whom I also plan to affect.

Individually, I have also critically examined myself. As a history minor in college, I have always been passionate and I felt somewhat knowledgeable about the subject. I have really enjoyed realizing there is so much more out there, especially in the area of African-American history. I think this experience has moved me to be more aware of my actions, words, and thoughts towards others in the future,

Especially the children who will arrive at my classroom door every morning. Certainly, more time and reflection are necessary to outline both specifically and generally how this workshop has changed me as a person. Thank you so much for this life-changing opportunity.

"Persevere in the practice of all other accomplishments."

Thomas Day wrote to his daughter, "I want you to persevere in the practice of music and in all other accomplishments that may be useful - or satisfying to you and your friends in your intercourse throughout life.

This is a lesson that we can and should take away with us. We have all seen first hand at this conference individuals, who excel in their crafts, their arts, and their ambitions. And, I am certain that each of them have persevered through many great trials.

Be it through the research and education of Laurel and Charlie Sneed have shared with others through TDEP, through the dramatic presentations and readings performed by Rhonda Hatton and Ken Grady, the seamstress work of Nellie "Chubb's" Miles, the written performances of Mike Wiley, the songs of the Travellettes, the furniture making of Jerome Bias - each of these individuals has shown us amazing examples of those who: "Persevere in the practice of all other accomplishments."

Now it's our turn to be certain that we do the same... Thank you for providing this inspirational workshop.

Our sincerest thanks to all who took time to write so thoughtfully and candidly about their workshop experiences. It's important to keep foremost in mind that without the generous Landmarks grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) and the supportive sponsorship of the North Carolina Museum of History (NCMH) these workshops would not have been possible. NEH and NCMH provide the "wind beneath the sails" and the participants and the wonderful staff members, scholars, teacher mentors, museum professionals, archivists, site coordinators, actors, and craftspeople we work with provide the inspiration to keep on keeping on.

Laurel and Charlie