

Proposal

Brief Description of Fellowship:

Travel to Ghana to research, explore, and document the history of enslavement and the slave trade in West Africa in the 18th and 19th centuries.

Fellowship Rationale and Purpose:

The US History 1 curriculum implemented by the Boston Public Schools is quite good in making history “alive” for its students, but its lack of depth in exploring the history of enslavement in relationship to the United States is glaring. The history students at my school learn the work of true historians by coming to their own conclusions and perspectives based upon the evidence at hand. In many of my units, students are using primary source documents upon which to base their arguments. However, the units about the history of the slave trade and enslavement in this country contain significantly less information, sending an implicit message that this epoch of history is less important than studying about important presidents or wars. I have been able to successfully supplement the curriculum materials with resources like Choices from the Watson Institute at Brown University. In one unit, students recreate the actual arguments of a debate in the Rhode Island legislature in which citizens debated whether or not to end slavery in the state. Again, though, these supplements are presented from the American perspective, rather than a global perspective, which would include Africans. At this point in my teaching practice, I would like to learn how other countries, especially West Africans, tackle this extremely difficult subject matter in their own classes. I would like to know, what resources do they use? How do they implement primary sources into their curriculum, and how do they incorporate the presence of preserved artifacts (i.e. slave castles from the 19th century) into their teaching?

The biggest challenge that I face as a history teacher is how to make the most of the times period that I cover so that they are both engaging and challenging to my students. I believe that the use of rendering primary source documents is one of the most important skills that students can learn in any history class. It is a skill that is transferrable to other courses, and I believe it demonstrates that a student is beginning to learn the skills that are “college-ready” – reading difficult texts, writing persuasively, and using evidence to back up your arguments. The history department has been moving towards integrating more primary source text analysis into the curriculum and standards, and I believe strongly that this is the right direction in which to go. It is a goal of mine to lead other history teachers in implementing primary source text analysis into their practice.

Project Description:

I am proposing for my fellowship to travel to Ghana, where much of the slave trade was conducted between Africans and Europeans (especially the British) during the 18th and 19th centuries. Ghana is also where many of the artifacts from this time period are preserved, both in the slave castles along the coast line, as well as the archives at the University of Ghana.

Once approved, the first objective to complete will be to coordinate my trip with the contacts that I have made both in the United States and Ghana. From my initial research into this topic, I have found that Ghanaians in general do not feel comfortable discussing the history of the slave trade in their country. In reading *Routes of Remembrance: Refashioning the Slave Trade* by Bayo Holsey,

the history of the slave trade has not been removed completely from the literature and narrative of Ghana, but “rather they marginalize it” (Holsey 2008). These questions about what gets included in a nation’s historical narrative are not unique to Ghana; the United States wrestles with these same questions in its own history textbooks and classrooms. I will also be preparing to audit part of a course at Harvard University with Professor Emmanuel K. Akyeampong. Professor Akyeampong has given many lectures on the history and impact of the slave trade on Ghana and its national psyche. He also has many contacts at the University of Ghana, and I have been assured that he will be able to get me several meetings with professors at the University of Ghana. His name is well respected there. Because of the tricky tension in being a foreigner wanting to discuss difficult topics like the slave trade, it will be important to my research to have these contacts.

Once in Ghana, the key activities of my proposed fellowship will be to document in photographs and some video film the slave castles of the West African coast. Many of the most well-preserved slave castles in West Africa are in Ghana, including the Elmina Castle and the Cape Coast Castle, both UNESCO world heritage sites that lie outside of Accra, Ghana’s capital and largest city. There are also prominent historical sites within Accra itself. My research will also include visits to several museums in the area, including the National Museum and the W.E.B. DuBois Cultural Center, both in Accra. I will be spending most of my time making these visits. From my preliminary research, it seems that giving at least one full day to each site will be sufficient time. I have planned five site visits (Elmina, Cape Coast, as well as three sites in Accra). I believe that this will be sufficient time to explore these places and document them. Documenting these places is important because they will bring life to the project for my students and colleagues. Being able to see vivid images of the centuries-old places where slaves were actually kept before being shipped to the Americas will be a powerful tool for engagement in a unit on enslavement.

The goals outlined in this proposed fellowship can be achieved in two weeks. This will allow sufficient time to explore the archives at the University of Ghana, visit the various slave castle sites (all within a day’s drive of Greater Accra), as well as interview available Ghanaian scholars that have expertise knowledge on the subject.

Teacher Growth and Learning:

This fellowship will help me to explore the key questions and learning goals by allowing me to experience first-hand the work of historians. It is this aspect of learning, the investigation of history, that the fellowship can help me most in achieving. I can bring back all of these experiences – as a researcher, ethnographer, and a historian – back to my students and colleagues. I am fascinated by the revelation in my early research that the slave trade of the 18th and 19th centuries in West Africa is considerably less important to Ghanaian educators than the independence movement of the 20th century. The way that Ghana has developed a national narrative that exults its successful expulsion of a colonial oppressor, while ignoring much of its own ugly history, is not unique. There are many parallels to the history of Ghana and the United States. I believe that this trip will not only give me considerable insight into this time period, but also it will allow me to research and interview the impact that such a national narrative has had on the educators and people of Ghana.

In college, I majored in history. Since becoming a teacher, I have often relied on the skills and knowledge that I acquired then. I believe that the strong content knowledge that I have in many aspects of United States history has allowed me to find unique and diverse resources to draw upon

for lesson plans. This has had a positive impact on my students, as they explore history outside of a textbook. However, I continue to struggle to teach the history of enslavement to my students. I am confident that if I had more content knowledge in slavery to draw on, I would struggle less in delivering effective lessons on this important history. Teaching enslavement well is critical to my growth as a teacher because I believe it is what can engage ninth grade students the most. Facing History, a professional development organization in Brookline that I have worked with often, instructs teachers that history understanding is best strengthened when curricular materials are intellectual rigorous, emotionally engaging, and force students to ethically reflect. This ideally should lead to informing students towards civic responsibility and participation. I believe that the history of enslavement, with the right materials, meets all of these qualifications for historical understanding. I do not feel that I can grow as a teacher without striving to meet these objectives in making a unit on the history of the slave trade a major part of my teaching in United States history. This fellowship will allow me to meet these goals.

Student Growth and Learning:

Students will benefit the most from the fellowship because they will have access to new materials and documents to explore this historical period of enslavement. In addition, students will be able to more fully understand the inner-workings of the jobs of historians as they recreate the steps with me in exploring this history. I envision creating a unit that allows students to assume the role of a historian with me in approaching the history of enslavement in North America in the 18th and 19th centuries. Students will have multiple modes and media to connect to this history: through video, photographs, and documents. Although some of these materials are available to my students already, what is difficult is to make the work of historians relatable to them. They read from secondary sources, but do not feel connected to these historians, people that live in far away places sometimes. I feel that if a teacher in his or her own school was doing the work of a historian, then they would engage in that work as well. I could also make the work of a historian more transparent – when historians have a question, they research that question and go to the source. The project itself can be a teaching tool for students to explore all of the things that a historian must consider on a trip like this – Who must I ask to prepare for this trip? What would I need to prepare for such a trip? What books must I read? – among many other questions to consider.

Benefits to School Community:

My school community is a place where history is explored in great depth, rather than a place where history is given a cursory, superficial glance for the sake of covering all historical time periods. I believe strongly that the fellowship and its outcomes will further deepen what the history department has done so well in the years that I have been at the school. I plan to share all of the materials that I acquire with the History and English departments at my school. I trust that teachers at all grade levels will have the expertise to be able to use primary source documents and photographs to help to enhance their current units, like the 8th grade ELA teachers that cover units on slavery and use films like *Roots* to supplement the literature that they read. For those that feel less confident in using this material, I am committed to working with them in creating lesson plans and unit plans where these materials might be utilized. I know that many teachers have expressed positive interest in having access to images and documents related to this time period. At my school there is a strong collegial atmosphere that emphasizes working together (interdisciplinary) to make the learning experience of our students better. I think this project aligns well with the spirit of the work of the faculty at my school.

There are several ways that I will be able to share my research with my colleagues. In the past, I have been offered opportunities to lead professional development at my school. I have worked with several staff members on creating websites for their classrooms, and thus I am confident that the administration at my school will also allow me to share my research with faculty during professional development days at our school. I also make use of my classroom website as a portal for students, parents, and teachers to access my materials and resources. I will use my website to give colleagues access to the research that I gather for the fellowship.

Plan For Implementation of Fellowship Learning

I have created a Curricular Unit Outline as my plan for implementation of fellowship learning. The curricular unit outline is copied below. It contains unit guiding questions, goals, identification of student skills and content outcomes, teaching methods, and assessments.

Unit guiding questions:

- How do we remember a traumatic time period like the period of enslavement? How do Americans remember, and how is this different from how Ghanaians remember?
- Debate question – Should slavery continue, be abolished immediately, or be abolished gradually? (from Choices debate activity on slavery debate reenactment in Rhode Island in the 1790s)
- How can I better understand the experiences of enslaved people?
- How can I look at maps, images and other primary sources to help me better understand history?
- Are Africans as responsible for the creation of the Atlantic slave trade as Europeans?

Goals:

- Students will learn how historians in both Ghana and the United States document the period of time in the world known as enslavement
- Students will learn about The Triangular Trade – it was the first major global industry, and its profits were extremely high; it involved a transatlantic slave trade between European countries, African nations, and colonies in the Americas. New Englanders developed the Triangular Trade; it involved ships plantation colonies of the Caribbean carrying sugar to be distilled into rum in New England and then shipped to Africa where it was exchanged for enslaved people who were carried back to the Caribbean to produce more sugar.

Student skills:

- Read and analyze maps, images, and primary sources by asking guiding questions
- Document and study the lives and experiences of one or more enslaved people
- Work collaboratively in a group to analyze the issues framing the 1783-84 debate in Rhode Island about the future of slavery.
- Write a well-organized 5-paragraph persuasive essay (taking it through various stages of the writing process – editing, revising, publishing)

General Content:

- The Triangle Trade – from Europe, to Africa, to the Americas (and in my class, mainly New England)
- How the slave trade worked on the Ghanaian coast (then known as the “Slave Coast”)

Teaching Methods:

- Class lectures
- Primary source investigation
- Interactive student-led station activities devoted to the maps, images, and primary source documents collected in Ghana

Assessments:

- Students debate on Rhode Island and slave trade
- Students complete a persuasive 5-paragraph essay that answers the question: Are Africans as responsible for the creation of the Atlantic slave trade as Europeans?

Budget Narrative:

For this project to succeed, I will need air travel to Ghana, as well as funding for living in Accra for two weeks, which will include food, transportation, and fees to cover admission to museums and historical sites. The dates that I have selected are between August 3, 2011 and August 17, 2011. From my research, this is considered a high season for travel to Accra for Ghanaians returning home, but a low season for tourists. As of January 16, 2011, the lowest airfare for travel between those dates from Boston is \$1,868.00 roundtrip. According to Bing.com, these prices are not expected to rise anytime soon.