St. Andrew's MAGAZINE

FALL 2008
WINTER 2009
SPRING 2009
SUMMER 2009

- The Gift of St. Andrew's
- Exploring Diversity
- Pipes & Drums

Mission Statement of St. Andrew's School

In 1929, the School's Founder, A. Felix duPont, wrote:

The purpose of St. Andrew's School is to provide secondary education of a definitely Christian character at a minimum cost consistent with modern equipment and highest standards.

We continue to cultivate in our students a deep and lasting desire for learning; a willingness to ask questions and pursue skeptical, independent inquiry; and an appreciation of the liberal arts as a source of wisdom, perspective and hope. We encourage our students to model their own work on that of practicing scholars, artists and scientists and to develop those expressive and analytical skills necessary for meaningful lives as engaged citizens. We seek to inspire in them a commitment to justice and peace.

Our students and faculty live in a residential community founded on ethical principles and Christian beliefs. Our students collaborate with dynamic adults and pursue their passions in a co-curriculum that includes athletics, community service and the arts. We encourage our students to find the balance between living in and contributing to the community and developing themselves as leaders and individuals.

As an Episcopal School, St. Andrew's is grounded in and upheld by our Episcopal identity, welcoming persons regardless of their religious background. We are called to help students explore their spirituality and faith as we nurture their understanding and appreciation of all world religions. We urge students to be actively involved in community service with the understanding that all members of the community share responsibility for improving the world in which we live.

St. Andrew's is committed to the sustainability and preservation of its land, water and other natural resources. We honor this commitment by what we teach and by how we live in community and harmony with the natural world.

On our campus, students, faculty and staff from a variety of backgrounds work together to create a vibrant and diverse community. St. Andrew's historic and exceptional financial aid program makes this possible, enabling the School to admit students regardless of their financial needs.

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Back cover: On April 18, 2009, Natalie Reese '97 and Morgan Foster '97 witnessed the christening of the brand new girls' racing shell, "Natalie Morgan." The name honors the rowing accomplishments of Natalie and Morgan, and the generous support of their families for the St. Andrew's crew program.

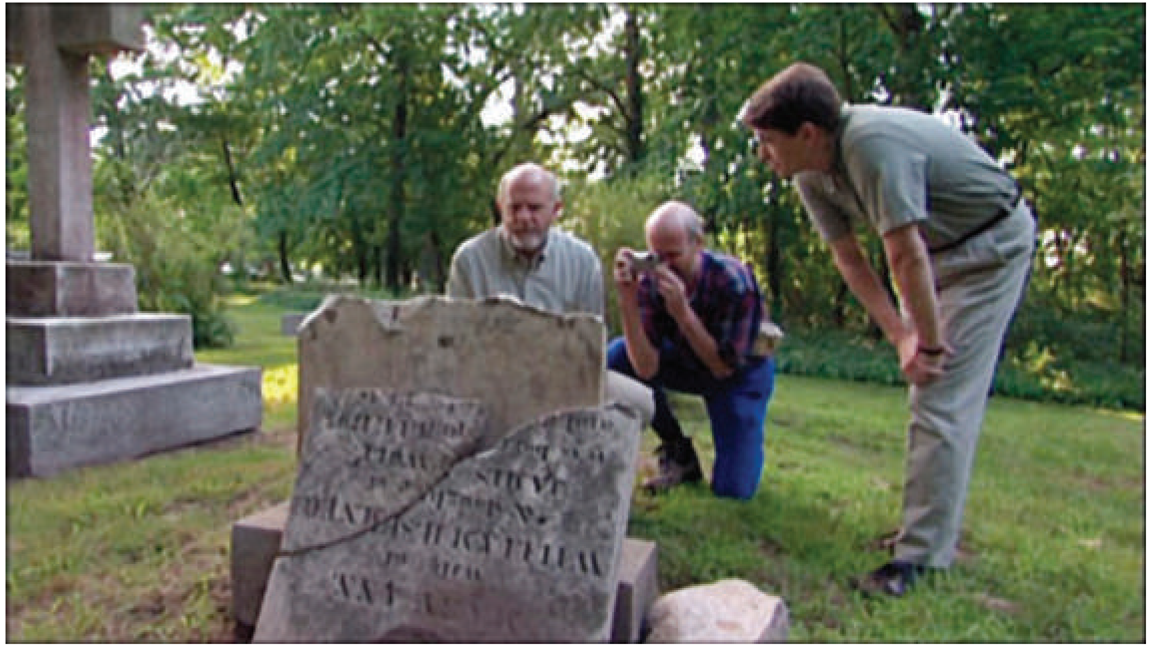
RACE RELATIONS REACTIONS

by Jean Garnett

WHEN ST. ANDREW'S DIVERSITY CO-DIRECTORS Stacey Duprey and Treava Milton invited Dain and Constance Perry to campus for a series of workshops, they knew they wanted to start a discussion about race within the community, but they couldn't predict what directions that discussion would take. Expert facilitators of "courageous conversations" about race, Dain and Constance came ready to grapple with unsettling questions about the legacy of slavery and racism in this country. How would students react to their radically candid approach to such a tough and taboo subject? ➡

FILM SCREENING AND WORKSHOP TRIGGER DISCUSSIONS ABOUT RACE RELATIONS ON CAMPUS

◀ "Door of No Return" *Photo credit: Bradley Ennis (www.BradleyEnnisPhotography.com)*



▶ Dain, Jim and James Perry at James DeWolf's family cemetery in Bristol. *Photo credit: Courtesy of Katrina Browne.*

The Perrys began the special program with a screening of the acclaimed and controversial documentary *Traces of the Trade: A Story from the Deep North. Traces* is about one family—Dain Perry's family—and their struggle to face the horrific offense underlying an esteemed and prosperous heritage. On a broader scale, though, it is a film about America, about what Barack Obama has called "this nation's original sin" and its disturbing echoes in the present. Posing difficult questions about race, racism, reparations and responsibility, the film is indeed an ideal catalyst for conversation. In order for such conversation to be productive, students would have to be courageous and receptive—brave enough to risk honesty and open to hearing some potentially disturbing truths.

When Dain's distant cousin, filmmaker Katrina Browne, learned that her New England ancestors, the DeWolfs, were the largest slave-trading family in U.S. history, she felt totally lost as to "how to connect the dots between the past and the present." In the late 1990s, in an effort to confront and make sense of this shameful heritage, she and nine relations (including Dain) retraced the Triangle Trade, the Rhode Island-West Africa-Cuba route by which their ancestors trafficked in human beings.

From 1768 to 1820, three generations of DeWolf men ran a bloody but hugely profitable business: They sailed from Bristol, Rhode Island to Ghana and traded rum for African men, women and children. These captives were taken to Cuba, either to be sold at auction or put to work on DeWolf family-owned sugar plantations. Sugar and molasses were transported to family-owned rum distilleries in Bristol, and the cycle renewed itself like so. In all, the DeWolf family transported more than 10,000 enslaved Africans across the Middle Passage, and they amassed an enormous fortune. By the end of his life, James DeWolf had been a U.S. Senator and was reportedly the second richest man in the United States.

Tracing this history is emotionally and physically uncomfortable, both for DeWolf's

descendants and for those watching the film. Leaving behind the clean colonial stone of Bristol, where the DeWolf name is proudly inscribed in plaques, statues and churches, the 10 travelers suddenly find themselves in a packed clay dungeon on the African coast, a tunnel of small, dark rooms and an iron door ("the door of no return") leading to the ocean. This is where enslaved Africans were sardined by the hundreds as they awaited an equally crammed journey across the Middle Passage. The descendents, complete with fanny packs and sunscreen, wander uneasily through the dark, touching the damp walls, gazing through the patterned bars of the door at the eerily blanched light outside. This is the moment that brings the atrocity home to them. They can no longer withhold judgment on the grounds that "those were such different times." Now they are here, where their forefather traded rum for human beings, and they must accept the fact that this man did evil things with his eyes open.

Dovetailing with some of the unsettling discoveries St. Andrew's students make in their history and English classes, the film forces its audience to revisit and revise the distorted narrative of this country—the story of who it belongs to, what it was built on and where the blame lies for the atrocities that occurred here. The history of the DeWolf family, and other prosperous northern families (including the Browns of Rhode Island) destroys the deep-rooted misconception that slavery was a Southern problem, and shatters the post-Civil War myth of the North as an abolitionist haven, always and uncompromisingly fighting for freedom. Accepted in the North for over 200 years, slavery was a cornerstone of northern commerce, and while the DeWolfs were one of only a few slave-trading dynasties, many northern citizens were indirectly tied to the trade, owning shares in slave ships to make a profit, purchasing goods produced by slave labor, and so on.

Throughout their trip, Katrina and her relatives struggle with a sense of impotence. What are they hoping to achieve by taking this journey? Despite their attempts to confront their history, to come face to face with its meaning, they cannot escape the confines of the Western tourist experience. They traverse the Middle Passage by jet. In Ghana, camera crew in tow, they join a candlelight vigil honoring millions of kidnapped Africans. As the only white faces in the procession, they feel like intruders, and so they are. In Cuba, sunburned and mosquito-bitten, they are treated to generous portions of "slave fare" and given the chance to sample some "slave labor"—feeding sugar cane through an old wooden juicer.

The absurdity of these reenactments is not lost on them; rather than affording any sense

▼ Tom DeWolf speaking with an African-American woman during a candlelight procession that was part of Panafest in Cape Coast, Ghana. *Photo credit: Amishadai Sackitey.*

of the slave's experience, they highlight its utter inaccessibility. Their mission in taking this trip, though vague, is honorable; they are looking to confront a very troublesome truth. But, as they come to realize over the course of the journey, their ability to perceive this truth is limited, and all the Ivy League degrees between them cannot change this fact. They can never see through the eyes of the stolen people whose bodies and sweat brought their ancestors a fortune. Their privilege is, ironically, an impediment here, a kind of shackle...

For the DeWolf descendents and for white Americans watching the film, the most unsettling questions are waiting at the end of the journey: What is our relationship to this history? To what extent are we implicated in the crimes of our ancestors? And if we are, how can such a wrong be repaired or reconciled? Katrina and her relatives must now decide whether they use their newfound education in order to assuage personal guilt, or as a springboard for action. Has their journey just ended, or is it only now beginning?

▼ DeWolf descendants discovering the ruins of George DeWolf's "Noah's Ark," one of five plantations owned by DeWolfs in Cuba. *Photo credit: Courtesy of Katrina Browne.*

When the film ended, the lights came up and Dain and Constance Perry took the stage. Constance asked everyone to take a moment to reflect, and then to choose and say aloud one word expressing what they were feeling in response to the film. The brief silence that followed felt tense. Would students risk voicing their reactions in front of all their classmates?

As it turned out, not only were they ready to express their reactions; they were actually eager to discuss and explore them. Single words began to break the silence, slowly and then in rapid succession. Students felt: Frustrated. Helpless. Relieved. Ashamed. Hopeful. Confused. Curious. Skeptical. Ignorant. Angry. Outraged. Incredulous. Betrayed. Misunderstood. Lucky. And when Dain and Constance asked them to elaborate on these words, they did so boldly and honestly.

This exercise turned out to be crucial in terms of setting the tone for the discussions to follow. By asking students to voice their initial reactions in single words, Dain and Constance brought the discourse to a gut level, while at the same time affirming everyone's reactions as perfectly and equally valid. It was OK for a student of European descent to feel angry at being implicated in a history that wasn't his own. It was OK for a South African student to feel alienated at being classed by the color of her skin rather than her culture. It was OK for a white student to wonder why people couldn't just "get over" slavery and focus on the present. By creating an atmosphere of safety and openness, the Perrys cut through the fears (of judgment, of giving offense, of being

◀ DeWolf descendants looking at family records from the slave trade at the Bristol Historical and Preservation Society, Bristol, RI. *Photo credit: Holly Fulton.*

misunderstood) that often inhibit discussions of race.

English teacher Darcy Caldwell was particularly struck by the number of white students who spoke in response to the film. "Since I came to St. Andrew's in 1991 we have had a lot of conversations about racial awareness," she said, "but what set the *Traces of the Trade* weekend apart from the other workshops and conversations was the increase in the white voices that Friday night's film triggered. The film moved us beyond awareness to willingness. The film spoke to the white kids in a very serious and powerful and unnerving way, and it prompted the vital engagement of white voices in the conversation.

"The film made white kids think about where they came from, and the discussion following the film prompted white kid after white kid to describe his or her family's participation in slavery, discrimination and recognition of white privilege. It was the first time I had heard that many white voices participating in the conversation. One student said his great grandfather was the grand dragon of the Ku Klux Klan in Georgia. Another white student said his family had owned slaves. Another white student described the destructive behavior of his relatives and he explained that although he did not define himself by their behavior, he accepted it and he was ready to move past it. Another white student described his attempt to free his uncle from racial stereotypes and how helpless he felt. The courage in the room was awe-inspiring."

This outpouring from white students is exciting and auspicious in that it breaks the mold. "[B]lack Americans are used to talking and thinking about race," observed Katrina Browne in an interview for PBS, "it's white Americans who are uncomfortable with talking about race, and who don't have the vocabulary for it." That night in Engelhard, and in the workshops that took place the following

morning, many white students proved that, given a safe, supportive environment and a prompt, they do have a vocabulary for talking about race. It is a vocabulary that springs from the heart as well as the intellect, one that honestly reflects inward complexes of guilt, indignation and the desire to shed a fraught history and start fresh.

Why is it important or necessary to have these conversations at a school like St. Andrew's, an anti-racist community consciously working to promote diversity and inclusion? Treava Milton and Stacey Duprey would argue that such discussions are targeting an enemy that is subtler—and maybe more formidable—than blatant racism.

Most white Americans today say they believe in equal opportunity and find racism repugnant, and the discourse surrounding racism deals increasingly with hidden adversaries. Tim Wise, author of *White Like Me: Reflections on Race from a Privileged Son*, says that while the overt racism of individuals is loathsome and destructive, the more dangerous problem is America's institutionalized racism, the "internalized cultural conditioning" that perpetuates reflexive racism in our minds and in our social systems. Wise argues that this species of prejudice, which does not require bigotry to operate, is all the more insidious in being unaware of itself. Without being racist by design, such systems of thought, education, governance and representation nonetheless lead to a racist impact. The term "white privilege" helps explain how whites can benefit from and perpetuate racist systems without being racist themselves, simply by enjoying certain advantages, opportunities and head starts that are denied or unavailable to others.

A whole language has been created to address this kind of unintentional inequity. Psychologists John Dovidio and Samuel Gaertner coined the

▶ Katrina Browne and a Ghanaian child on the ramparts of Cape Coast Castle slave fort. *Photo credit: Courtesy of Katrina Browne.*

term "aversive racism" to describe the prejudice of "unprejudiced" people and institutions. Aversive racism carries conflicting implications. On the one hand, it hints at the tenacity of cultural biases; on the other, it reflects a conscious "aversion" to them and a desire to transcend them.

Dr. Beverly Daniel Tatum traces unconscious bias to our internalization of the "cultural smog" of media stereotypes, family influences, geographic insulation and other forces in our every day lives. With such roots, there is no question that these prejudices are deep and persistent. But they are certainly not unconquerable. In fact, it is the job of education to challenge and remove the biases students bring as baggage from childhood and absorb through osmosis from pop culture. The St. Andrew's curriculum is based on the principle that great education forces students to rethink, revise and look again at what seems known or familiar. By their very nature, seminar discussions affirm this model of perception and "knowing" as a process of trying on different points of view.

Diversity work requires the same suspension of solipsistic certainty that academic inquiry demands. And it requires the same kind of open exchange that transforms perception. The first steps in overcoming unconscious bias, says Christine Savini, founder and principal consultant of Diversity Directions, are awareness and open dialogue. Diversity work relies on dialogue, which allows us to move from simply seeing "difference" to celebrating, investigating and learning within diversity.

And dialogue seems to be the legacy Dain and Constance left at St. Andrew's. "I don't know if they achieved what they set out to achieve," said John Lavanga '10, "but in terms of just getting us talking, they were extremely effective. A bunch of us came to the dining hall after the workshop was over and talked for literally five hours." Mike Quist '09, who helps oversee a freshman boys' hall, said that the workshops spurred some exciting and unusual discussions on dorm. "We've been talking about things we wouldn't normally talk about," he said.

Sixth Former Michel'Le Bennett felt the workshops helped challenge some assumptions within the community. "Sometimes I think people have the idea that because this is St. Andrew's, and because we talk about diversity, there can't possibly be any discrimination in this community. In the workshops, some students of color had the chance to speak up and say that there were times they felt discriminated against, and it was good to get that out in the open."

So, we are speaking openly, having the tough conversations. Can we now sit back? Is diversity at St. Andrew's "working"? It depends on whom you ask. "Only one in five of the students here are students of color," says Michel'Le, "so while we may be working towards a perfectly diverse community, we are not there yet."

In addition to revealing new voices in the community, the *Traces* program confirmed something already apparent: Students of color don't need a workshop to tell them that racism

▶ DeWolf descendants walking to Narragansett Bay, Bristol, RI. *Photo credit: Laura Wulf.*

and white privilege are real and operative, even at St. Andrew's, nor do they need to have the benefits of talking about race explained to them. To a great degree, it is students of color who are driving diversity work at St. Andrew's, joined by a few dedicated white allies. These are the students who show up at meetings and work to identify issues that trouble the student body and the community as a whole. The central challenge of groups like the Cultural Exchange is the question of how to involve a broader base of students in the School's diversity work. "These meetings are great and productive, but we are preaching to the choir here," said Divya Natesan '09 at a Cultural Exchange meeting this past winter. "We need to get the kids who aren't convinced about this work. We can't force the kids who don't care to come, but they need to be here more than anyone, and we can't make progress without them."

Dain and Constance may have held a mirror up to the issue of race at St. Andrew's, but the onus is on members of the community to respond. Some students felt that they were left "holding the bag" of complex concerns that demand attention. For Sam Patton '09, another member of the Cultural Exchange group, the workshops identified some serious issues and then failed to provide proper guidance as to how to address them. "It seemed that neither the students nor Dain and Constance had answers for how to solve the issue of unseen prejudice against people of color in schools," he said, "so while those questions and issues are at the top of our minds, we don't know how to solve them."

If *Traces* left students with unanswered questions, they were at least the right questions, vital enough to fuel further discussions. And hopefully the film and the workshops served as object lessons in the importance of persistent questioning.

After returning home, Katrina, Dain and their relatives entered a period of questioning: What was the meaning of their journey? What

responsibility do they have? Facing a centuries-old problem built into the narrative of this country, what can they possibly *do to make a difference*? Answers come through intensive discussion and reflection. It is only after the travelers return home that they begin to recognize the "traces of the trade" that are still with them. Without invalidating their own accomplishments, they begin to recognize the advantages they have enjoyed, the pathways that have been open to them, the protection from institutional bias that they enjoy as whites and as members of a moneyed family. Coming face to face with their role as beneficiaries of a murderous system, Katrina Browne and several of her relatives settle on an answer: They feel a responsibility to address the inequity that has grown out of the dehumanizing work of DeWolf and many of his contemporaries.

The case of the DeWolf descendents is somewhat unique in that they have a direct tie to a slave trader, but Katrina argues that her family story is a microcosm of a larger narrative: As a beneficiary, white America as a whole was complicit in this "original sin" and the eras of violence and Jim Crow that followed.

In his opening remarks at the screening of Katrina's film, Headmaster Tad Roach echoed her sense of responsibility:

"Why study the slave trade or acknowledge that the proceeds, assumptions and spirit of the trade benefitted and continue to benefit whites in American society? We study history of our past sins, abuses and acts of depravity, indifference and violence to understand more completely the source of our blindness, weakness and selfishness. We remember that our own worldview, assumptions, morality and definition of God's will and American goodness may in fact be remarkably flawed, dangerous and destructive. I argue that hundreds of years later, we who live with the benefits but not the disgrace of the system have to think about ways we can act and live to make a difference, to make it right, to make reparations to the human spirit, the human family, to the very principles of America itself. To run from our collective responsibility, guilt and privilege is to embrace the injustice and depravity all over again."

Whether or not all the students believe in "collective responsibility" for the legacy of slavery, the *Traces of the Trade* program had a profound effect on them. In addition to inciting awareness of unconscious bias, the workshop offered a chance for the community as a whole to engage in "courageous conversation" that may very well have expanded the discourse on diversity at the School.

"In all the events and programs we do, we are trying to get the kids talking, openly and honestly," said Treava Milton a few days after the workshops. "That is the skill we are trying to teach them in this work. We want them, when they go off to college, to university, to the professional world, to be able to sit down with someone completely different from them and have a genuine and mutually respectful exchange. That is the goal, and these workshops have definitely brought us closer to that goal."