Program Overview

“The summit seemed to make slavery past and present more real,” Participating Teacher
February 11, 2013 4,200 participating students and teachers onsite and online

The National Youth Summit on Abolition is the third in a series of webcasts presented by the National Museum of American History that are designed to bring middle and high school students together with scholars, teachers, policy experts, and activists in a national conversation about important events in America’s past that have relevance to the nation’s present and future. On February 11, 2013, through a webcast that included a moderated panel discussion and web chat, over 4,200 students and teachers in 33 states and the US Virgin Islands as well as Kenya, Canada, Pakistan, Malta, and Brazil reflected together on the abolition movement of the 19th century and explored its lessons for ending modern-day slavery and human trafficking. The program featured excerpts from the PBS AMERICAN EXPERIENCE documentary The Abolitionists. Two hundred and forty-four (244) students from Washington, DC’s public middle and high schools attended the event in person at the National Museum of American History. Two hundred and eleven (211) attendees pre-registered to watch alone or in a group for a total of 3,266 pre-registered viewers, a similar level of interest to the previous National Youth Summit on the Dust Bowl’s 291 pre-registered viewers. Concurrent programs took place at two Smithsonian Affiliate museums, the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center and the Heinz History Center, and at President Lincoln’s Cottage. Responses to the program were overwhelmingly positive, with responses from teachers such as, “The whole class felt motivated.”
Guiding Questions for the Program

- What is the legacy of the 19th century abolition movement for efforts to end modern-day slavery and human trafficking today?
- How can students better understand the challenge of ending slavery and the courage of 19th century abolitionists?
- How can lessons of the past be used to address issues today in the classroom?

Program Moderator and Panelists

Moderator Alison Stewart: award winning journalist who has been on NBC, MSNBC, ABC, and MTV News; previous host of the PBS news magazine Need to Know and NPR’s The Bryant Park Project; named one of “The Root 100” in 2009

Panelist Lois Brown: Class of 1958 Distinguished Professor at Wesleyan University; historian and professor of nineteenth-century African American and American literature and abolitionist narratives; historian advisor for AMERICAN EXPERIENCE’s The Abolitionists

Panelist Ken Morris: Founder and President of the Frederick Douglass Family Foundation, a non-profit organization dedicated to ending modern slavery; great-great-great grandson of Frederick Douglass and great-great grandson of Booker T. Washington

Panelist Ana Alarcon: student-activist; senior at the Metropolitan Learning Center in Hartford, CT; president of the extracurricular group, Student Abolitionists Stopping Slavery (SASS)

Panelist Ambassador Luis CdeBaca: Director of the United States Department of State Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons

National Museum of American History Program Development Team

Susan Evans, Lead program producer and project manager
Naomi Coquillon, Program producer (K-12 adviser & materials developer, outreach and evaluation manager)
Julia Garcia, Program producer (manager of Smithsonian Affiliates, graphic design, hospitality & onsite audience)
Christopher Wilson, Program adviser (manager of funding, series sustainability, & content)
James Staples, SIAV lead
Keith Madden, Theater producer
Nancy Bercaw, Historian
James Zimmerman, Talent and travel coordinator
Erin Blasco, Social media lead
Daniel Holm, Project assistant
Megan Smith, Creative consultant
Partner Organizations
The Youth Summit program development team worked extensively with the following partner organizations to develop this program and its supporting materials:

- State Department Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons
- Polaris Project
- Slavery Footprint

Smithsonian Affiliates
In connection with the National Youth Summit on Abolition, the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center in Cincinnati, OH, served as an official Affiliate partner and brought together nearly 250 area high school students to participate in a national panel discussion around historic and modern Abolitionist movements. Following the national summit, the Freedom Center hosted a local panel that highlighted the significant role that Cincinnati played in the historic Abolitionist movement, and how this story relates to the modern-day Abolitionist movement.

The Freedom Center’s panel consisted of:

- Panelist Don Gerred: Director of Justice Projects at Crossroads Church in Cincinnati, Ohio.
- Dr. Eric Jackson: Northern Kentucky University, Institute for Freedom Studies

In addition, the Heinz History Center, another Smithsonian Affiliate museum, hosted their own program for local Pittsburgh, PA students. The Heinz History Center has been a model partner on past National Youth Summits. For this Youth Summit, the Heinz History Center committed their own funds to participate in the program.

"Employment of Negroes in Agriculture", by Earle Richardson, 1934, Smithsonian American Art Museum

Anti-slavery medallion, after 1789
Initial Feedback
Thirty-two participants replied to the post-Summit survey as of February 25. Of the respondents, 70% were classroom educators, and most were high school educators (47.1%). Overall, participants enjoyed the program and found it valuable. Eighty-two percent of participants rated the overall quality of the program a 4 or 5 on a 5 point scale. When asked their goals for the program, and whether those goals were met, many (41%) expressed their goals as to wanting to connect the past with the present, while an additional 26% were interested in enhancing their lessons on slavery, and 19% expressed interest in the platform. Overwhelmingly, teachers reported that their goals had been met. Teachers noted, for example, that:

- “I was thrilled to have our goals met. Participating in a dialogue connecting past slavery prior knowledge to learning about present day abolition was a wonderful opportunity for our students.”

- “I was interested in getting my AP US history class a part of something bigger than our class and community. I wanted them to have the opportunity for an authentic learning experience outside of our day to day activities.”

In addition, registrants were asked an open-ended question about what prompted them to register for the Summit. The most common response was that the webcast related to the topic of abolition—23% noted that they were studying abolition or the Civil War at this point in the year, another 6% said they were interested in the topic generally, and another 6% said that they were using the program to connect with their studies for African American History Month. By contrast, the next most common response was “youth development” or interest in justice or peace, at 13% of respondents.
Thirty percent of respondents said the highlight of the program was the webcast discussion or the discussion it generated in their classes, while the same percentage appreciated hearing from Ken Morris, a direct descendant of Frederick Douglass. Fifteen percent of respondents also noted that they appreciated having their students be part of something bigger or that they were honored to be part of the program and another 15% appreciated hearing from fellow students and particularly the student panelist. Typical quotes include:

- “My students liked most when the young people were talking and realizing that everyone has an impact; that young people can make a difference.”
- “Watching the National Youth Summit generated a lot of great discussion in our classroom.”
- “Listening to a direct descendant (me). Bringing the issue of human slave traffic[ing] to today (students).”
- “They were delighted to see their questions answered and treated as intelligent questions deserving complete, thoughtful answers.”

Teachers were asked an open-ended question about the response in their classrooms and the issues that most intrigued or inspired students. Responses included that the Summit spurred discussion (21%), raised awareness about modern slavery (21%), improved understanding of 19th century slavery/classroom curriculum (13%), or motivated students to take action (8%). Sample quotes include:

- “They had such a great time and loved the way the visit fit into the curriculum so smoothly.”
- “They were excited to participate and they were shocked at the number of people involved.”
- “A panelist mentioned that the country prospered, had economic advantages because of slavery. We discussed economics.”
Conversation Kit
Teachers who registered for the program through the museum’s website received a “Conversation Kit,” an educational resource giving background information, connections to standards-based curricula, lesson plans, and discussion suggestions to prepare teachers to teach this topic at age-appropriate levels and to attend the webcast. It included resources from our partner organizations and was reviewed by the Deputy Director of Polaris Project, the Community Manager of Slavery Footprint, Smithsonian curatorial staff, and the Museum’s Public Affairs team.

Feedback on the Conversation Kit was overwhelmingly positive. Despite having only one week between the distribution of the Conversation Kit and the Summit, a majority of teachers (58%) reported using the conversation kit to prepare, and they found the format and content of the kit, especially guiding questions, to be useful. As one teacher noted:

- “This was a well done resource, especially the guiding questions helped frame the summit nicely.”

Anecdotal evidence suggests that the Conversation Kit could have served as a marketing tool for us if it had been available farther in advance. One teacher noted specifically that she would have appreciated earlier notice of the Summit and the materials. Ideally this resource would be available when the marketing effort begins.

Research Process and Timeline
- **Training with Polaris Project** (October 2012): The Youth Summit program development team attended a training session with Polaris Project to learn about Polaris’ educational model.
- **Teacher Focus Group** (October 2012): Scott Abbott (DCPS Social Studies Specialist), Angela Stevenson (PreK-12 Social Studies Content Specialist, Montgomery County Public Schools), and Jodi Gratman (Social Studies Department Chair, Loch Raven High School, Baltimore County Public Schools) came together at NMAH to discuss the feasibility of the topic for high school students. All agreed that the topic of modern-day slavery is one to which high school students immediately connect. The group felt that, because it was such an immediate issue, linking modern-day slavery to 19th century abolition would help students connect to learning history. Information was provided about the kind of background information teachers would need and that feedback was incorporated into the conversation kit.
- **Scholars/Peer Review** (October 2012): Smithsonian curators Fath Davis Ruffins, Nancy Davis, and Nancy Bercaw joined together with Spencer Crew from George Mason University and former director of NMAH, Maurice Jackson from Georgetown University, Edna Greene Medford from Howard University, and Richard Bell from University of Maryland to discuss the connections between 19th century abolition and modern-day slavery. This was a great discussion about the definitions of slavery and complexity of the topic. At this meeting, it was determined that the Youth Summit should focus on comparisons between the tactics of 19th century abolitionists and efforts to end modern-day slavery today.
- **Yale’s Gilder Lehrman Center Conference** (November 2012): Susan Evans, Naomi Coquillon, and Chris Wilson attended Yale University’s Gilder Lehrman Center for the Study of Slavery, Resistance, and Abolition’s 14th Annual International Conference: “Abolition, Past and Present: Scholars, Activists, and the Challenge of Contemporary Slavery.” There, they met 19th century historians and modern activists and were part of discussions about the connections between the two fields. Scholars and activists were thrilled to learn that the Smithsonian was doing work around this topic and NMAH staff developed strong connections with partners in this field.
Developing the Online Program Platform
The National Youth Summit on Abolition was produced with internal Smithsonian funds and with the support of the Verizon Foundation at a budget of approximately $25,000. This was the first of our National Youth Summit programs that was produced completely in-house, using publicly available resources. The webcast was broadcast using Ustream, the chat feature was purchased through Cover-it-Live, and captioning was performed through WGBH in Boston. These features were easily integrated onto a page within the Museum’s website for a modest cost of approximately $5.50 per viewer.
The majority of participants found the webcast easy to use. A quarter noted that they had no technical issues, while 17% noted problems with sound, although based on our internal conversations, it is unclear if this is just an end user issue.

Outreach
Outreach was conducted predominantly through existing communications streams at the Museum and partner sites. In addition, program information was posted on the National Museum of American History’s homepage, Smithsonian’s History Explorer homepage, and on the Frederick Douglass Family Foundation and National Underground Railroad Freedom Center’s websites.

In January and early February, Museum staff sent an e-blast to our educator list of 8,056, to 560 past participants in Youth Summits, and to a list of 16,911 social studies department chairs and district supervisors purchased through MDR. Of the MDR list, 826 unique recipients (4.88%) opened the email, with a 1.22% click rate for the program URL. PBS’s AMERICAN EXPERIENCE and the Frederick Douglass Family Foundation sent information on the Summit in their e-newsletters, and the State Department Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons shared information on the Summit with their Global Youth Councils, a network of groups operating at over 50 American embassies around the world dedicated to addressing issues import to the world’s youth.

Social media outreach for the program launched in January with messaging on Twitter (45,627 followers for @amhistorymuseum and 6,666 followers for @explorehistory), Facebook (44,896 fans for the National Museum of American History), and Pinterest (2,093 followers for the National Museum of American History’s Abolition & Modern Slavery board). These messages paid special attention to the anniversaries of the Emancipation Proclamation and the 13th Amendment, the airing of The Abolitionists documentary, and Human Trafficking Awareness Day and Month, and included images from the Museum’s collection and a shareable web graphic with basic information on the Summit for Facebook and Pinterest. Rachel Frazier, a follower on Pinterest, noted in response to a graphic about modern slavery on our Abolition and Modern Slavery board:

- “This story made me cry. Thank you so much for posting it and raising awareness that slavery is an ongoing atrocity in the ‘modern’ world.”
Tweets that were posted while the PBS AMERICAN EXPERIENCE documentary aired were the most retweeted and clicked. We also received some nice tweets during the program that show student engagement and the value for classrooms:

- **@amhistorymuseum as a class we are writing newspapers to gain awareness on modern slavery. What other things could we do? #endmodernslavery**

- **@amhistorymuseum thank you for live streaming this summit. It is a very useful tool for us, and also plants many good seeds for discussion.**

- **Watching the live stream from class this is a very pressing issue #endmodernslavery**

Key twitter accounts that shared the Summit during the program:

- JTIP_State - 3,246 followers
- SIAffiliates - 2,493
- UTCouncilSocSt - 275
- HistoryCenter - 9,056
- SmithsonianEdu - 7,224
- MLibraryHealthy - 1,301
- Smithsonian - 842,783
- SILibraries - 12,509
- AmExperiencePBS - 9,421
- NURFCrich - 163
- EDSitement - 2,914
- WesternHistoryD - 147
- NEHgov - 4,785
- Us - 44,839

This is a total of 941,156 followers. Erin Blasco, social media specialist at the Museum, posted key tweets from the program here: [http://storify.com/amhistorymuseum/endmodernslavery](http://storify.com/amhistorymuseum/endmodernslavery).

In addition, the Museum posted two blog posts about the Summit—an informational post in January, which received 313 total page views (276 unique) and a Q&A on historical and modern slavery with Harvard Professor John Stauffer in early February, which received 411 page views (385 unique).

Besides direct traffic, Google searching, social media, the blog, and Smithsonian’s History Explorer brought traffic to [americanhistory.si.edu/nys/abolition](http://americanhistory.si.edu/nys/abolition):

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The Museum’s Office of Public Affairs, in collaboration with the public affairs office of Smithsonian Affiliations, distributed a press release (http://newsdesk.si.edu/releases/smithsonian-hosts-national-youth-summit-abolition) in early February. A story about the Youth Summit program was widely released through the Associated Press and picked up by news outlets around the country. Other press included an article about Ana Alarcon’s participation in the Summit in the Hartford Courant: http://articles.courant.com/2013-02-10/community/hc-hartford-abolitionist-0211-20130208_1_victim-advocates-modern-day-abolitionists-abolitionist-fair and a story about Lois Brown’s role on the panel in the Wesleyan newsletter: http://newsletter.blogs.wesleyan.edu/2013/02/06/brownpanelist/.

However, those who registered for the Summit reported finding out about the program predominantly through e-blasts (48%) or from colleagues (29%).

Onsite Audience

“My class was highly engaged and I think part of that was the fact that they had the opportunity to have museum educators visit our school and we took part in the pre-work suggestions.” Onsite Participating Teacher

All of the students attending the program at the National Museum of American History were middle and high school students from the following Washington, DC Public Schools: Phelps Alternative Education High School, Anacostia Senior High School, Luke C. Moore Academy High School, Columbia Heights Education Campus, and Richard Wright Public Charter School for Journalism & the Media Arts. Students from Phelps Alternative Education High School were invited by the Museum; the group’s teacher is a member of the Museum’s teacher advisory committee. The remaining schools were recruited through a partnership with the DC Arts and Humanities Education Collaborative.

Registering teachers were asked to fill out a survey explaining their motivation for participating in the program and how this would be incorporated into their classrooms; three of the five teachers completed the survey. Teachers were also offered the opportunity to have Museum educators visit their classes to prepare their students for the webcast; only the Museum’s teacher adviser was able to incorporate this into her schedule. As a result, not all students were as prepared or engaged as we had hoped.
Some of the online audience found the onsite audience distracting, while others expressed that they felt there should be more interaction with the audience. We see the recruitment, preparation, and involvement of our onsite audience as an area of growth for the program.

As Ken Morris so thoughtfully noted after the program:

“You can never tell how the students are receiving the information by their demeanor. I’ve seen students, who appear to be the least engaged, ask the most poignant questions when given the opportunity. These audience members are exactly the young people we want to reach most. Theirs is the kind of energy that’s best channeled for positive change. Conversely, they’re also the easiest to give-up on which makes them vulnerable to becoming both victim and perpetrator of the anti-social crimes we discuss in our service-learning project.”

Options for improvement at future Youth Summits include better preparing the onsite audience and making expectations clearer at recruitment for teachers and students. This could include a mandatory application process for schools. Another option we are pursuing is partnering with one or two schools or classes for an ongoing relationship leading up to the Summit, or having a small group of well-prepared students instead of a large audience.

Lessons Learned
Of those who offered suggestions for improvement, 27% suggested an improvement to the sound and video or a technology check before the program, 22% thought it should be more interactive, and 16% suggested more student involvement including more students on the panel or more student question. Another 16% recommended having a more engaged onsite student audience. A representative quote is as follows:

- “Longer program so that students can have more time to process and also make the programs more interactive with participants and the audience. More visual representation and more student voices since it is a Youth Summit.”

The decision to connect a documentary film on 19th century abolition with modern-day slavery was a potentially controversial one, but as the survey results suggest, teachers were intrigued by the connections and found the conversation to be a useful one for their classes; many survey respondents were most interested in connecting 19th century abolition with modern issues. Also, as one teacher noted:

- “I never would have connected slavery to human trafficking. Students were able to better identify with modern slavery and because of this, it encourages students to get more involved.”

The Youth Summit team believes that the Youth Summit series should continue to do programs that push the envelope on content and look at history in new ways.
Special Thanks
The National Youth Summit on Abolition would not have been possible without the assistance of our partners: PBS’s AMERICAN EXPERIENCE, Smithsonian Affiliations, the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center, the United States Department of State Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons, Polaris Project and Slavery Footprint. The program was made possible by the generous support of the Verizon Foundation.

We are deeply grateful to both these external partners and to our colleagues at the Smithsonian National Museum of American History for supporting the team during this project. The topic was challenging, meaningful, and impacted thousands of students around the United States and the world. The team has learned so much from this experience and future Youth Summit programs at the National Museum of American History will be richer for it. Thank you!

Panelists with DC Public school students.