

OUTLASTING DENIAL

A CASE STUDY IN
CURATORIAL ACTIVATION
AROUND DAVE THE POTTER

ORRON KENYETTA
ETHAN LASSER
CLAUDIA MOONEY
JON PROWN

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A CASE STUDY IN CURATORIAL ACTIVATION AROUND
DAVE THE POTTER

Presented by
THE CHIPSTONE FOUNDATION
& THE GREEN GALLERY PRESS

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*Here are my ambitions for this museum:
I want to amplify Dave, I want to bring new life
to old objects, I want to get a new body of people
interested in craft. I want to make temples like this
museum accessible to folk who go to other temples.
You know, Temple Swapping.*

–Theaster Gates, Jr.
Speaking at the Milwaukee Art Museum
April 26, 2010

Introduction

This is a book about the past meeting the present. It is a book that brings a striking historic artifact from the South into conversation with poets, scholars and school children from the Midwest. Most of all this is a book of voices, a text that weaves together the voice of an enslaved artisan and poet from the past with the voices of the twenty-first century city.

Our protagonist is a man known today as “Dave the Potter.” Born around 1800, Dave was a slave. For most of his life he was owned by a man named Lewis Miles who ran a pottery factory in Edgefield, South Carolina. For over fifty years, Dave made pots for Miles and his partners. He created hundreds of vessels and jugs and bottles, but he is most famous for his giant storage jars: massive, 40-gallon stoneware vessels that were among the largest pieces produced in South Carolina in the decades before the Civil War.

Like all enslaved African-Americans, Dave's life, from the day he was born, was prescribed with restrictions and obstacles. As the property of another man, he was not free. He did not have the right to own property of his own or to sell the pots that he produced. He could not move about as he pleased and he did not have the right to protect his family. His wife and his children could be taken away and sold at any moment.

Dave was also barred from learning to read or write. An 1834 Amendment to the South Carolina Slavery and Freed Persons of Color Act subjected slaves who taught other slaves to read and write to fifty lashes. Whites faced a stiff fine for the same offense.

In the face of this law, Dave flaunted his literacy and education. In 1834, just before placing one of his jugs into the kiln, he picked up a sharpened stick and inscribed a couplet into the wet clay at the top of the vessel,

*Put every bit all between
Surely this jar will hold 14*

Dave repeated this chirographic process at least twenty-eight more times between 1834 and 1865, when he gained his freedom. The text of his writings can be found in the appendix that follows. As the list shows, Dave also often signed his name underneath the couplets, proclaiming himself as both author of the poems and creator of the pots. Carved into heavy clay

jugs that have lasted for more than a hundred years, Dave's couplets continue to speak to us and to the future.

In the Spring of 2010 the Chicago artist Theaster Gates, Jr. responded to one of Dave's most extraordinary pots in an installation at the Milwaukee Art Museum. Gates used music, sculpture and film to celebrate Dave's legacy and to share his inspiring story. Though Gates' installation is now closed, his work has continued through the Dave Project, a mobile museum curated by the Chipstone Foundation and the Chicago poet Orron Kenyetta.

Since it was first initiated in the fall of 2010 the Dave Project has carried the story of Dave the Potter to schools, churches, shelters, community centers and after-school programs throughout the Milwaukee area. At each venue Kenyetta has lead a two-hour workshop. Participants interpret Dave's poems and draft poems of their own in response to Dave's legacy. To date over 500 Milwaukeeans have participated in this process.

This book is a record of the Dave Project and a tribute to all of the Milwaukeeans whose insights and enthusiasm has made the project such a success. The text is structured as a conceptual guide for replicating the process. We begin in Part One with the facts: Dave's couplets, historical information provided by scholarship, and the data that

surrounds an object. We then move to activation with a poem by Orron Kenyetta and a map showing the locations of the workshops in the city. A dialogue based on the comments of various workshop participants and a selection of the couplets created by the community follows. The text concludes with some reflections on the project and lays out some future pathways for engaging communities and meeting the present equipped with the artifacts and stories of our past.

The epigraph to this essay articulates Gates' vision of "temple swapping," of merging museum and city, past and present, white and black. We hope that this volume, this assemblage of voices from across time and place, will inspire temple swapping in other museums and encourage institutions across the country to activate the objects in their collections and bring their stories out into the community where they may matter most.

We are grateful to Joe Riepenhoff and the Green Gallery Press for their support of this project.

—The Dave Project Team

Orron Kenyetta
Ethan Lasser
Claudia Mooney
Jon Prown

A Time Line of Dave the Potter

c. 1801

Dave is born into slavery in the Edgefield District of South Carolina.

c. 1818 TO 1832

Dave is owned by Harvey Drake. Drake runs the Pottersville Pottery in partnership with Dr Abner Landrum.

1832 TO 1836

Harvey Drake dies. Dave is sold to Reuben Drake, Harvey's brother, and his partner Jasper Gibbs.

1834

Dave dates and inscribes his first vessel: "Concatination," meaning the state of being linked together or changed. The same year, South Carolina passes the *Slavery and*

Freed Persons of Color Law, condemning slaves caught writing or teaching other slaves to write to 50 lashes. The law also condemns masters caught teaching their slaves to write to fine and imprisonment.

1836 TO 1846

Rev. John Landrum (Abner's brother) buys Dave from Reuben Drake. Landrum moves Dave to his pottery at Big Horse Creek in Edgefield and loans the slave to his son-in-law, Lewis Miles, who opens his own pottery factory.

1847 TO 1849

Franklin Landrum, John's son, buys Dave after the death of his father and employs him at his pottery on Big Horse Creek.

1849 TO 1865

Lewis Miles officially buys Dave and moves him to the Lewis Miles Stoneware Factory on Stoney Bluff Plantation, also on Big Horse Creek. Most of the surviving Dave vessels with poems hail from this period.

1860

South Carolina secedes from the Union.

1870

The South Carolina census records a David Drake in Edgefield District, indicating that Dave took on the name of his first master once granted freedom.

1880

Dave dies sometime prior to 1880.

The Inscriptions of David Drake

WRITING	DATE
Concatination	June 12, 1834
Put every bit all between surely this jar will hold 14	July 12, 1834
oh the moon + the stars hard work to make big Jars	August 22, 1834
Horse, mules and hogs — all our cows is in the bogs — there they shall ever stay till the buzzards take them away	March 29, 1836
Catination	April 12, 1836

A better thing I never saw When I shot off the lions jaw	November 9, 1836
Ladys & gentlemens Shoes see all you can: & nothing you'll loose	January 29, 1840
whats better than wishing while we both are at fishing	February 10, 1840
Give me silver or; either gold Though they are dangerous; to our soul	June 27, 1840
Dave belongs to Mr. Miles wher the oven bakes & the pot biles	July 31, 1840
Edgefield District	August 25, 1840
Another trick is worst than this Dearest Miss, spare me a kiss	August 26, 1840

Not Counted	May 16, 1843
Just a mammouth jar . . . for I not . . .	October 17, 1850
Cash wanted	May 17, 1852
Lm says this handle will crack	June 28, 1854
for Mr. John Monday	July 6, 1857
I wonder where is all my relations Friendship to all — and every nation	August 16, 1857
I made this jar for cash — though its called — lucre trash	August 22, 1857

A pretty girl on a virge
volca[n]ic mountain, how they burge August 24, 1857

Making this jar: I had all thoughts
Lads & gentlemen: never out walks January 30,
1858

A noble jar
For lard or tar February 20,
1858

this is a noble churn
fill it up it will never turn March 19, 1858

I made this for our Sott
It will never — never — rott March 31, 1858

This noble jar will hold 20
fill it with silver then you'll have plenty April 8, 1858

A very large jar which has four handles
pack it full of fresh meat — then light April 12, 1858
candles

When you fill this jar with pork or beef
Scot will be there to get a peace, —
This jar is to Mr Segler who keeps April 21, 1858
the bar in orange burg
For Mr Edwards a Gentleman —
who formly kept Mr thos bacon horses

The sun, moon, and — stars
in the west are plenty of — bears July 29, 1858

I saw a leppard & a lions face
then I felt the need of — grace November 3,
1858

Nineteen days before Christmas Eve
Lots of people after its over December 6,
1858
How they will grieve

Mark and Dave March 10, 1859

I made this out 2 number & cross
If you do not listen at the bible you'll be
lost — March 25, 1859

Over noble Dr. Landrum's head
May guardian angels visit his bed April 14, 1859

Hive is eighteen; hundred + fifty nine
unto you all I fill in — — cline April 18, 1859

Good for lard or holding fresh meat
blest we were, when peter saw the folded
sheets May 3, 1859

Made at Stoney Bluff
for making lard enuff May 13, 1859
Dave Baddler

Great & Noble jar
hold sheep goat and bear May 13, 1859
Dave & Baddler

The forth of July is surely come
to blow the fife = and beat the drum July 4, 1859

Rev. W. A. Lawton July 19, 1859

I saw a leopard & a lions face
then I felt, the need of grace August 7, 1860

A noble jar for pork or beef
then carry it a round to the Indian chief
November 9,
1860

I — made this Jar all of cross
If you don't repent, you will be lost May 3, 1862

A Dave Pot



Storage Jar, Lewis Miles pottery, 1858. Alkaline-glazed stoneware. H. 25 5/8". (Courtesy, Arthur Goldberg; photography, Gavin Ashworth.)

Dave in the glaze

By Orron Kenyetta

the beginning is the time before
men woke up to their consciousness
in open meadows of imagined possibilities.
the time when the fences seemed like
everything else that grew around our dwelling.
could he imagine that one day the horses would
breathe fire and fences would be focused to
cages that held the will and assets of men.
even the aftermath of the greatest calamity
offered stretches of the imagination
where you could venture into the forces
of nature without consequence 'cept
the consciousness recourse and detour
masters and slaves had their moments
in fact they came like roman fleets
there were moments when they find

themselves in the foxhole entrenched
and under the cover of rain
that seems to come in 52 vat weeks
as every vessel is the time it took to make
so sometimes in the defense of
the cow that gives the milk
the man has to tell you the lay of the land
and the laws that bind you together
the one that tears you apart.
when one day the reality of the
strange fruit that grows in the graveyards
of morality. yet the true sign of humanity
is that we go on.
we sing paeans for peons we blues and
shout for the most wicked of men

there were among men, those who
measured the course of their longevity
in the sequence of events.
the year of the great storm.
the summer of flood
herein some see a lifetime, others

the course of a single year.

gentle and domestic
yet contained with a chain.
he sleeps in the doghouse of men
and dreams of revenge, in malnourished
respice from the daylight of agony.
but to find a place.
not just the shade of the tree
but the living mirage from hunger
and anger.
and love.
the breathing quagmire and muck,
of the human in bondage finds the
down-presser as indentured as his
chattel. and cattle sometimes appear
as men, in paranoid hallucinations that
live slightly left of center.
in the shadows of guilt.
so to live, you must perform.
side show and circus act of planters.
boys and sirs and endless days,
musical chairs and the melody of sweat.

exploitation and stolen rest,
parade as lazy nigger and wicked cracker.
who both shall bow before the curtain is drawn.
boys and sirs and fleeting night
both standing in the darkness with,
their hearts in their hands.
imagining conducting life with
the scarlet organ, yet realizing the fate
of a dream come to life. where daylight
would too find them standing, lifeless
their hearts in their hands and their shame
in their mouths. so it was written by the
god of them all.
FEAR.

domestically disturbed to place it
lightly, in the very least.

to become a god.
a creator and saver of life.
life for better or bitter.
the watch of the man who

submits his genius to the council
of his hands.
leaves his era in a hypnotic state.
the land of legend and lore
that find their way through the generations
into the minds and tongues of
any who'll here the truth
even when it lies
outside their cause.
those who were wise found a way
to exist in the midst of their pain.
fugitives from the pains of labor
are sometimes encircled with the
envious octaves of screaming epidural
the shouting circle of uncertainty
invitations for famished spirits.

when they came with news
of his brother.
he was gone.
remember the spinning
realities in his head— they were aligned.

beast and woe stretch out your hand
and pull together all that has been lost.
the soil and the water driven
by the drum of the joojoo.
increased by kick — spell casting hands
take hold of earthen madness
tone and shape and hue of
men and madness.
its side effects and offspring.

the stretch of the mind.
the length of the land between.
his house and big house—
the plantation. the land
between Job and job.
almost equal to almost—
and eleven other conundrums,
that correlate nothing of the african
mind in old america,
other than the whip— almost equal.
the promises must somehow
be freed from tomorrow.

so we live in the right now like
no one.

the earth the drum and the fire inside.
entranced shaman
body in rhythm with thought with all.
the blank stare from the glazed eye.
mudman madman hazed with glaze.
that saw far beyond his place in time.
Dave was “in” the glaze
where trees were barbaric kilns
stoked with angered logs
burned and turned to find the answer
in the ashes.
dots dashes and slashes,
Dave was in the glaze.

waiting and sitting at the door of the kiln.
shuttered and spooked by the fire inside.
to reappear only after the baptism of fire
to emerge from it hardened and sealed.

ambivalent to the pace and politic that
called his kettle black. in so many words
in the context of their time. imagine Dave
imagine this
as fire conspires to petrify the earth.
the artist counters with a poem that
yearns to burn like vulgarities
that spill from the lips, to run down shoulders.
words birthed by the being of the vessel,
ships or chariots that swing real low.
to live in a time of great heroes
defiers outright to improperly pronounced
words like doom that are challenged by
the heroes of bad times who coded reality
in fables from common factors
great flashes of light
to strobe the misery to rhythmic struggling
a dance that would possess
Dave's mind and hands
until he became the starred gaze in his
eye, manifest in the face jug.
answering the call signaled by the smoke.
from mudman to Tubman — go. go. go. gone.

Dave was in the glaze.

to live in a time of great heroes
defiers outright to improperly pronounced
words like doom that are challenged by
the heroes of bad times who coded reality
in fables from common factors
great flashes of light
to strobe the misery to rhythmic struggling
a dance that would possess
Dave's mind and hands
until he became the starred gaze in his
eye, manifest in the face jug.

to reappear only after the baptism of fire
to emerge from it hardened and sealed.
ambivalent to the pace and politic that
called his kettle black. in so many words
in the context of their time. imagine Dave
imagine this

how could you ever measure me
outside the sum of mine.

my parents at the very least.
or my woman and my babies
or maybe its realized, the things we never
say, because we think they'll kill
us all- or bring us all together.
for some, one is as bad as the other.
but this too is a thing that
no one likes to say. so i'll toast
to my genius that was alive in its time
then return at night, to feather stuffed
burlap on a floor, and feel rewarded
in the fact that other niggers
aint got that.

and if i dwelled on my father
they'll probably get me killed.
they'd rather see me read and write
things that can be controlled, or so they
thought. but the thing about genius is just
that- an immovable entity that will not be
denied entry, and is tied to common
utility for better or worse.

my fathers were shamans and doctors.
my fathers saw themselves in me and
still walked away. they love you between the lines
even where they cross—
they hurt you cause they love you— bitter pill
and bitter cup.
the spared rod was a sign of hate, and
you couldn't hate em, even when you wouldn't feed em
you never really hated me.
i am the boy with no name,
for a time anyway. the obvious truth that can't be
ignored, not forever. genius will outlast denial
and recover every wrong right,
in one mighty fell swoop.
like ice water to hell dwellers
and bread to the famished. 40 acres and
a mule to every fool who aint already
took it, only to find that it was so spilled
with blood that red mud became the clay
to make the jars to hold the ashes
from the blood sacrificed of civilized men

*i made this jar all of cross
if you don't repent you will be lost*

-David Drake May 3,1862

when they came with news
of his brother.
he was gone.
remember the spinning
realities in his head— they were aligned.
beast and woe stretch out your hand
and pull together all that has been lost.
the soil and the water driven
by the drum of the joojoo.
increased by kick — spell casting hands
take hold of earthen madness
tone and shape and hue of
men and madness.
its side effects and offspring.

*i made this pot for our scott
it shall never ever rott*

-David Drake

the peculiar institute, and realities
of the time. implications sometimes are
the best definition, the only left to find.

*fill this jar with pork or beef
scott will be there to take a peace*

-David Drake

recovered relations in the concentration
of dedicated work. monuments odes and
epitaph secure the meaning between the lines
with living relations now intertwined
with the seaworthy fleets cast off from
the imagination. the fool who takes his own advice

nothing to be pitied,
nothing to be feared.
just the whisper of an antiqued notion.
whose wood is as good as
gone. angle and tax,
the stripped wax scored in
the pours of filthy rags in second hands,
beggar of far eastern secrets

poured into the ear of gossip
reaped from the percussive tongues
of the liar—
the crop that goes pop- pop pop- pop- pop pop
the radical point that exists
beyond the seed's needs
for the bee's knees
to bend and send the pollen
on the hair of the belly of
ab do men, who serve beyond
their own understanding. the
elusive salt absorbed into the ether
wanting a participant
waiting precipitance
wandering people who avoid the storm,
the beautiful storm—
that would make them grow.

having to see what lies beyond
the oasis in the great distance
the party for the party, before the party!
furious repetition,
in the paeon of peons.

the thing about beauty is that
its almost always trouble
so move the other way on the double.
beauty has a way of filling you up
then exploding from your hands.
but the thing about beautiful things
is that they are always the first,
to go. to be admired by powerful
green eyes,

*give me silver give me gold
though they are dangerous; to our soul*

-David Drake July 27,1840

to be loved by beauty is a tolerable
spell. casting your mind so far
you can even forget your bondage,
if you've ever seen it.
and in the end
you find that its the very nature
of beauty
to move on and to be seen.

what is to hope is to make your
impression upon her presence.

*i made this jar = for cash
though its called = lucre trash.*

-David Drake August 22, 1857

no one knows this like a man
like me, to be the beautiful thing.
there is a mantle for the beautiful
and for me this would be blocked.
but not withstanding this,
i've come to terms with the naturalized fact,
happiness is to be found wherever you are at.
one man will always give that much,
to one other. thrown bones of peace
the jawbones of once mighty lions
who martyred themselves to make way
for the mythology that would whisper
to them all. whose voice was impressed
across greater than paper—
“something that will never rott.”

*dave belongs to mr. miles
where the oven bakes and the pot biles*

-David Drake

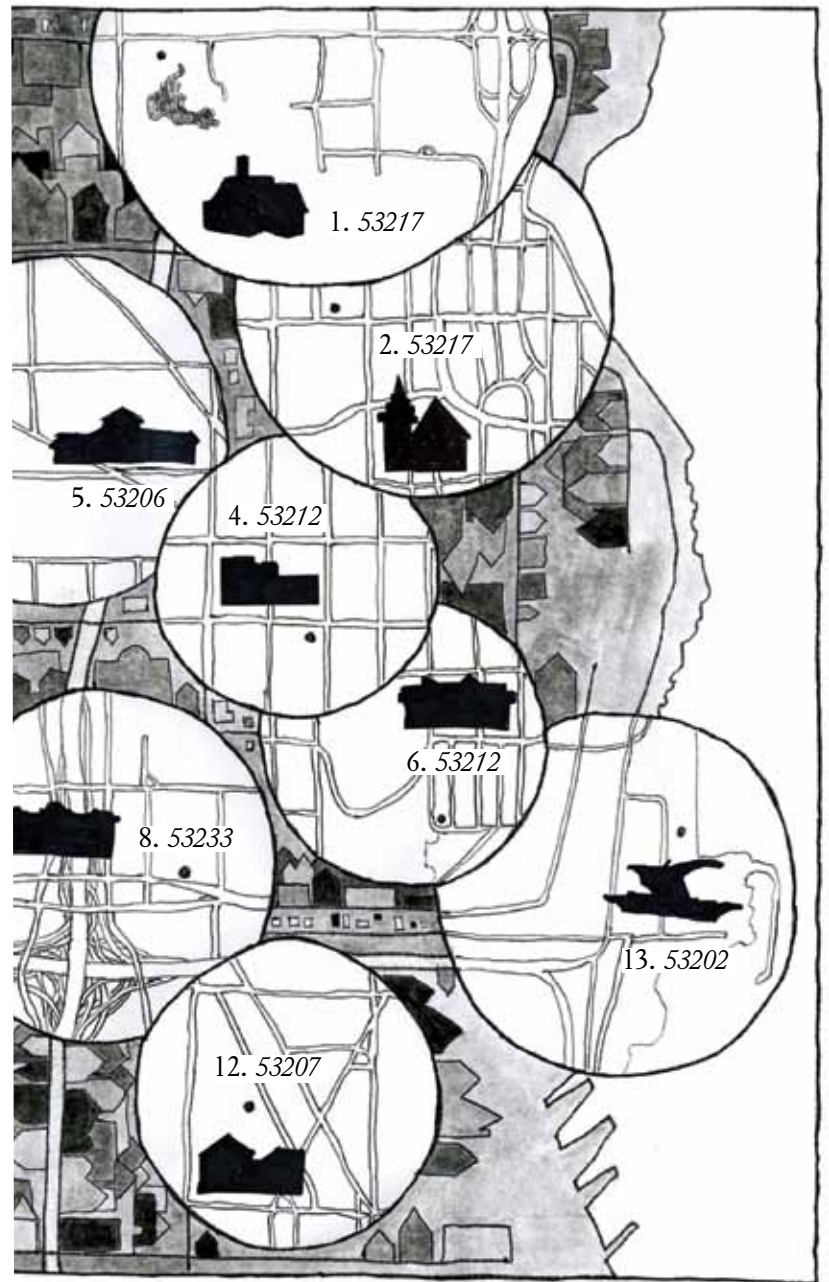
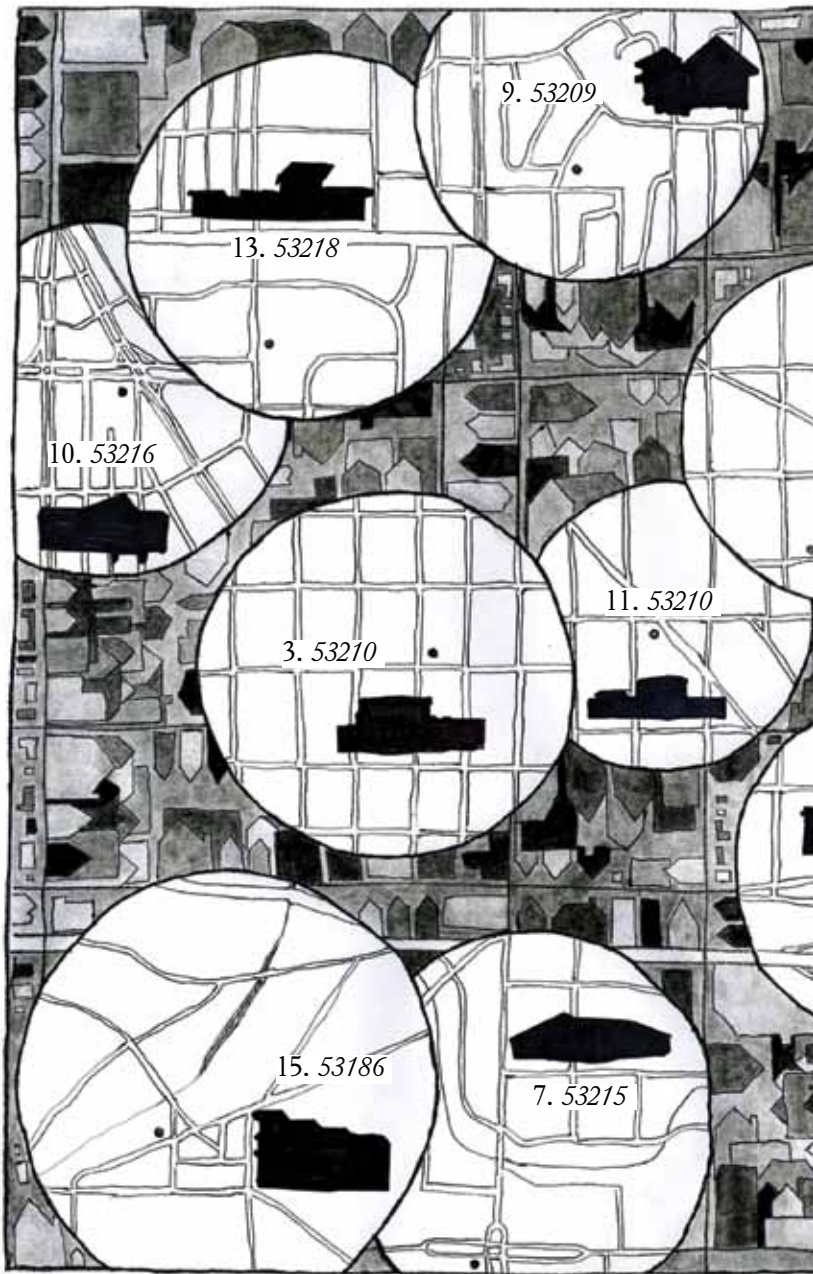
The Dave Project Workshop Locations

Zip Codes Correspond to Locations on Map

- | | |
|---|-------------------|
| 1. Lynden Sculpture Garden
2145 W. Brown Deer Road
Milwaukee, WI 53217 | October 24, 2010 |
| 2. Bayshore Lutheran Church
1200 E Hampton Rd
Whitefish Bay, WI 53217 | November 7, 2010 |
| 3. Alma Center
3628 W. Wright St.
Milwaukee WI, 53210 | November 16, 2010 |
| 4. Green Gallery West
631 E. Center St.
Milwaukee, WI 53212 | November 17, 2010 |

5. **COA Intergenerational** November 19, 2010
2320 W. Burleigh St.
Milwaukee, WI 53206
6. **COA Family** November 19, 2010
909 E. Garfield Ave.
Milwaukee, WI 53212
7. **Zablocki Library** February 12, 2011
3501 W. Oklahoma Ave.
Milwaukee, WI 53215
8. **Central Library** February 19, 2011
814 W. Wisconsin Ave.
Milwaukee, WI 53233
9. **Agape Community Center** February 20, 2011
6100 N. 42nd St.
Milwaukee, WI 53209
10. **Capitol Library** February 21, 2011
3969 N. 74th St.
Milwaukee, WI 53216
11. **Center Street Library** February 26, 2011
2727 W. Fond Du Lac Ave.
Milwaukee, WI 53210

12. **Sweet Water Organics** June 7, 2011
2151 S. Robinson Ave.
Milwaukee, WI 53207
13. **Alma Center** September 11, 2011
(at the Milwaukee Art Museum)
700 N. Art Museum Drive
Milwaukee, WI 53202
14. **Browning School &
Brown St Academy** October 21, 2011
5440 N. 64th St.
Milwaukee, WI 53218
15. **Adaptive Community
Approach Program** October 31, 2011
333 West Main Street
Waukesha, WI 53186



Workshop Dialogue
IN FIVE VIGNETTES

CHARACTERS

POET
CURATOR

HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT
THIRD GRADER

TEACHER
PROFESSOR

ELDER
SKEPTIC
PAROLEE

SETTING

A flexible space that can be transformed to portray diverse community settings in and around the most segregated city in the country: Milwaukee, Wisconsin. The setting should

evoke a feeling of belonging, for everyone onstage and within the audience. Whether it is a classroom, a library, or a community center, this place where people talk about art should be open and large enough to include a variety of voices, not only those who usually speak within the walls of galleries or museums.

TIME

A memory journey of the highlights and patterns of dialogue developed in the Dave Project workshops held from October 2010 to November 2011. Although the dialogue could be interpreted as taking place within one particular workshop, the play more accurately represents the wealth of insight built from various participants in workshops over time.

The Time is best interpreted as bright or recurrent moments, anecdotes that shaped the overall understanding of effective arts-based community outreach.

1. A Potter and Poet

A melody is heard, a deep song of the South with roots in Africa, and tendrils shooting into the Midwestern United States. The song seems both ancient and contemporary.

All Characters enter the stage from different areas and with their own unique styles of walking, yet they all connect to the rhythm of the overarching music. The Poet greets each person as he organizes the space and ensures everyone has a seat at the table or moveable desks in the room. While the Curator tests the technology equipment, the Poet attempts to make introductions between the other Characters. Some Characters accept his greeting while others seem more withdrawn. The Poet takes a drink of water and checks in with the Curator before turning down the volume of the music and taking Center Stage. The audience members should realize they are also part of the group shortly after the Poet begins to speak.

POET, with warm enthusiasm, speaking slowly and making eye contact with every participant: We are going to talk about Dave Drake, or Dave the potter. Dave the Slave. He lived in the mid-1800s in America, in South Carolina. He pauses and gently brings his fingertips together in front of his chest before moving to connect with the participants again. And we're going to talk about relations. When I say mid-1800s in America, we were coming up to the end of slavery. And what is significant

about that spot and this character Dave is the time in which he existed, and the things he did in his time.

ELDER, *incredulously*: I grew up in South Carolina. I never heard of Dave, Dave the Slave, Dave Drake.

POET, *with patience and wonder*: Dave was a potter. The plantation where he was enslaved, the Lewis Miles plantation, didn't grow tobacco or cotton. They made pottery. They sold pots to other plantations. Pots for holding food, food for slaves.

CURATOR, *clicking on a slide projector, speaking in a measured tone, confident*: Our understandings are based in research. Here is one of Dave's pots. *Using a laser pointer to show each feature*: It is made of stoneware, a particular kind of clay, and it has an ash glaze. The pot is about three feet tall and it looks like it could hold forty gallons. There are two handles, but the pot is so big that it is hard to imagine anyone carrying it—full or empty. It was probably used to hold slave rations—dried meats, salted fish...

[SLIDES PROJECTED THROUGHOUT PERFORMANCE.]

POET, *excited*: Dave was a potter. But more importantly, for me, he was a poet. He wrote, he inscribed poems on all of his pots. Inscribed on the top of this jar is a couplet, Dave's

signature and the date. *Referring to the slide and reading*:

When you fill this jar with pork or beef
Scot will be there to get a peace.
-Dave, April 21, 1858.

POET (CONT.), *after a deep pause*: There are forty vessels of this size still in existence that Dave made, each has its own couplet, its own poem. They are all over the country now. In Milwaukee, in DC, still down there in South Carolina. Forty vessels, forty different poems.

CURATOR: And this was a time when slaves didn't have the opportunity to get a formal education.

POET, *building momentum*: A time when slaves were prohibited from reading and writing by South Carolina law. *Directed to the High School Student and Third Grader*: In fact, young people, do you know what would happen if a slave was caught reading and writing?

HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT, *raising a hand*: They would be beaten, maybe executed.

POET, *in agreement*: Dave ran a serious risk writing on these pots. And so did his master; he could be fined or imprisoned for allowing his slave to write.

2. For the Future

The Curator wheels in the actual Dave pot artifact onstage. As noted, the pot is 3' tall, and can hold 40 gallons of liquid. The Characters gather around the pot with a certain reverence. Although the actual pot under the stewardship of the Chipstone Foundation is behind glass at the Milwaukee Art Museum, the outreach workshops, connected to the larger project of the exhibit, sought to bring Dave's art to life in greater Milwaukee. The community connection can be represented tangibly on stage by imagining the actual pot within a fictitious setting.

POET, *gesturing boldly*: Dave existed a long time ago, been long gone dead, a lot of information has been lost. But since he has been gone we have found forty of those vessels that still exist with his words written on them.

CURATOR, *tracing the laser pointer over the side of the pot*: All writing under the lip, the shoulder of the pot.

POET, *with excitement*: And that is the first indication of his genius. Dave was a master of his medium. Smart enough to know that if you wanted people to read your words, you put them in a place people visited everyday. What are the two places in the home that people visit everyday?

THIRD GRADER, *casually, eagerly*: The bathroom? I don't know. The kitchen?

POET: Yes: The bathroom. Yes: the kitchen, the place where the food is: the refrigerator. My mom used to put my poems on the refrigerator. And that is where Dave put his words. That jug is like a refrigerator for the plantation. You want to eat; you need to read his poetry. That is one mark of Dave's genius. There is another. *A dramatic pause and then*: What do we know about paper? *Holding up a piece of paper*: If I take this paper outside in the rain and the rain hits this work, what will happen?

HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT: It's going to come out.

POET: Fire?

THIRD GRADER: It's gonna burn.

POET: But this pot... it is called stoneware. When it is done it is hard as stone. Dave carved his words into clay, into stone because he wanted them to last.

ELDER: Like a gravestone.

POET, *somberly*: Like a gravestone. So who is Dave talking to? Who are these poems for?

HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT: All the slaves coming to the pot to get food—to get their “pork and beef.”

POET: For sure—and I’ll give you another hint: they are in this room right now... He is talking to us. He is talking to the future.

3. A Slave Artist

The Characters look at each other as the Curator wheels Dave’s pot to the side of the stage and returns to the slide projector. All Characters reconfigure to represent more of a traditional classroom setting.

TEACHER: He spoke himself into the future by being able to write on his artwork with his poetry. A slave artist.

POET: A Slave Artist.

SKEPTIC, *from the back of the group*: A slave artist?

While the Skeptic speaks, the other Characters react with facial expressions.

SKEPTIC, *standing*: Something made by a slave—that is an oxymoron. Slaves can only do what they are told to do, so in effect it could not have been done by a slave. It was built by

Dave’s master even if it was done with Dave’s hands.

HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT, *moving toward the Skeptic*: But what if he was smarter than his master? The information presented about Dave I think shows he is more intelligent than his slavemaster.

SKEPTIC, *pointing across the room at the pot*: That pot, it’s a product of exploitation.

POET, *bringing physical and emotional calm into the room*: Look, however you see things, one thing is for sure: Dave’s story throws everything we know about masters and slaves into question. There had to be something along the lines of intimacy between Dave and Lewis Miles, to allow him to write poems on his pots. You see it was a crime for Dave to read and write—and a crime for his master as well.

4. Dave Belongs

The Skeptic and the High School Student return to their seats and the Poet gestures for everyone to bring their attention to the slide show operated by the curator.

POET: Let’s look at one of Dave’s most mysterious poems.
Reading:

“Dave Belongs to Mr Miles

“Where the Oven Bakes and the Pot Biles”

Then, speaking directly to the group: What is Dave saying here? Where is the oven? What pot?

HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT: Is he talking about the kiln? The oven that bakes the clay? The pot that...

POET, *after a pause:* Biles?

ELDER, *leaning forward:* Biles. Biles! That is how we used to say boil in the South.

POET: He is talking about the kiln then: all the heat and steam that comes with firing clay. *Pause.* What about the first line? “Dave Belongs to Mr. Miles”

THIRD GRADER, *as if it’s obvious:* He said that because Mr. Miles is his Dad. So he says he belongs to him.

POET, *with a patient smile but not condescending:* You say it like it is. But Miles was not his Dad—he was white. Why would Dave say he belonged to a white man?

PROFESSOR: He is defining himself as property, as an object—but only in a particular place, at a particular time. He belongs to Miles, but only at the site where the pot biles. The implication is that elsewhere... elsewhere he is free.

POET: Yes, it is a statement for the record. A statement that says what Dave is now, at the moment when he wrote the poem, but not what he will be forever.

THIRD GRADER, *still working it out:* Or maybe he is saying Help. Maybe Dave wants help.

POET: Young people. Wow. Dave is screaming for help. Yes, it’s a cry for help. *Pause, and then:* I want you to let it sink in how courageous this guy had to be to write that poem on that pot. He did it openly. He did it repeatedly.

PAROLEE: Dave has earned his fame. Dave should be up there with Poe, with Hawthorne... with who knows how far you can put him up there. The sky is the limit. If there is ever conclusive proof that these things are deeper than they seem, holy crap.

Everyone smiles in their own way, a moment of connection is apparent in the room. The participants seem to relax in their chairs.

5. Milwaukee Now

The Poet paces around the stage slowly, weaving through the participants intentionally. Staging should emphasize the reverence

for each Character during these final lines of personal truths found within the workshop.

POET: What I want you to consider and remember as we talk about Dave and the past: I want you to think about yourself in the present. I exist in my time. When we talk about Dave I want you to constantly be relating this to yourself. Dave was speaking to us with those poems inscribed in stone, so what does he have to say to us? What can we take from him?

TEACHER: For one thing: We are living in a time when too many youth don't value reading and writing and are not willing to acknowledge the sacrifices made for them to have the opportunities to read and write. Dave should be a model for them.

PAROLEE: He opens an opportunity to have some conversation about race and the working man in America. He represents a strong part of what America was and where it should be going.

POET: Young people?

HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT: No matter your circumstances, you can still be great. That is the message: no matter what your circumstances, you can still be great. No matter where you come from, no matter what you do.

POET: Yes, Dave didn't let his condition define him. Dave belongs to Mr. Miles. He refused for the world to make him ashamed of things he could not control.

TEACHER: Well, there is something to witnessing history.

THIRD GRADER: One day, I want Dave to be as big as Martin Luther King... as Barack Obama!

ELDER: Mmm hmm. Mmm hmm. I kind of got into the DAVE feeling here.

All Characters laugh or smile and begin to stand up and stretch at their own pace. As the same melody from the beginning begins to play, each participant shakes hands with the others. As the curtain closes, the participants are still engaged in dialogue, some looking at the Dave pot, some inspecting the slides and some just deep in conversation.

Community Created Poems

What would you say if you had fifteen words that would last forever?

At each of the Dave workshops community members penned a poem in response to this question and to Dave's words. The following is a selection of these poems, which were written between October 2010 and September 2011.

Objectives are fleeting
Life is precious
Breath shall be cherished & left

EVERYDAY IS A MOMENT
TO EACH.
EVERY SOUL IS A STUDENT
TO REACH

*Turn, turn on the wheel
Is this clay my ticket meal*

Ngroeth
Well worn hands
History of ones life

JUST LIKE AN HOUR GLASS TIME PASS
WHAT WAS BORN TURNS TO GRASS
AT THE EDGE OF THE FIELD, MY WORLDS BURN IN STONE.
READ AND GRAIN....
READ AND REMEMBER....
READ AND CRY....

*I saw their lit rooms
And wondered
Did Dave or the doctor
Risk it?*

Casual to formula
Partial to full
Growing to grown.

DAVE CAN SEE DEEPLY
MY SPECS SEE NEATLY

*My Blood, an everlasting definition
Cannot truly be identified
With a mind of its own that
Cannot be terrified.*

This pot was created to whom will pay
To appreciate the toil contained today.

I CAN'T COME UP WITH
MY FIRST LINE EVERYTHING IN MY PAST IS
LEFT BEHIND

*Love is passion from the heart
love flows threw the vains
love can also hurt like pain*

My voice can carry only so far
Pray and belived and you
Will be save

RAISED IN THE CITY STREET'S
CHI TOWN SOUTHSIDE. HAD TO
CLIMB THE HIGHEST MOUNTAIN
JUST TO SEE THE OTHER SIDE,
THEY SAID I WOULDN'T AMOUNT
TO NOTHING, KICKED ME AT MY
LOWEST POINT. THEY LOCKED MY
DOWN IN SHACKEL'S BUT I'M
MORE THEN A CONQUER.

*I might
Be small
But my courage is still tall*

The Future is
Jamarion
Everday is Dawn

WHEN YOU FEEL YOUR ABOUT TO GIVE UP,
DON'T THE REWARD IS RIGHT BEHIND
THAT FEELING...

*Mr. Miles belongs to dave
No one escape an evil wave.*

Reminding the child that
Lived in the time
At a place
Where the man
Named Jim Crow
Truth be told
Some been told
The man has no soul

CUTS LIKE COLD
CHOCOLATE
HARD LIKE COLD
STEEL
MY HEART PORED LIKE A GRAVEL
MY SOULS SINGS
STILL

*The thing that put me here today
It will take us all the way*

With the touch of this pot
Think of all that came before and now is not

REACH AND REMEMBER,
AN EPHEMERAL THOUGHT STUCK FOREVER

*Education is the
Motivation for
Elevation. I give food
for thought go get
your plate men!
Elevate or disintegrate*

A man's material, embodies him
Is his attempt to reach another man.

VERY HAPPY WE SHOULD BE
THAT DAVE
WROTE POETRY
INSTEAD OF ME.

*I lay my stay
To live
Another day*

The Dog don't hunt that
Way no matter what
The hunter might say

BEIN MYSELF, ANSWERING TO
ABOVE DOING THE NEXT RIGHT THING

*Cast A future that
Will last
The past moves
Way too fast*

Penny For My Thoughts,
"Hell Nall" I Rather have
A dollar; Been out here
Perry Pushing Every Since
I Was a toddler". Raise in the streets
I ain't never had a father
Have A Father, Serving In
The World was a hard pill to swallow

WORLDLY WAYS CORRUPT
NUMB UPON GOD'S TOUCH

*awakened abruptly all grown up
the wounds of a child sewn up*

The oldest of three, laughter, love & family

PATIENCE AND FAITH, NINE SONGS AND A PRAYER
SO HARD TO WAIT, MY JOY TO CARE

Storytelling on canvas with brush in hand
Is absolute joy and freedom. I am trapped
In my own literal thoughts when I try
To write my own story as a poem.

WE SAW WORLDS OPENING
DREAMING WE ALL BELONGED

*I thought the world was starting to change
But the same old pieces just rear range.*

I am the clay, God is
The Potter.
The jar we form can hold
The power.

A CRAFTSMAN MAY BE CLOSE TO OLD
HIS SKILL, HOWEVER, CANNOT BE SOLD

*If Keyan could see beyond he would see A light
That shines over him
At night*

The weather is warm but getting cool
To shiver alone you would be a fool.

A GIRL WHO LOVES LIFE LIVES
LIFE FOR EVERY ONE ELSE

*I was once in the past preparing
For now. But now
Im the future, the
Change, And preparing
To bow.*

What we assume
Will always be,
Won't.

FREE TO BE ME!
UNSTOPPABLE YOU SEE

*Working for the best
Forgetting all the rest*

There's A legacy of love that lies within me
I stretch my thoughts as far as
My heart can see

I BELONG TO MYSELF THAT'S HOW IT SHOULD BE
THAT IS ME

*We were created equal in the eyes of the lord
Lets keep hope alive by sharing his word*

fighting for our will....
Still climbing up that
Hill!!!!

DAVE RESIST/
AND STILL EXISTS

*Every thought I think every day is "will I make it in life.
Or shell
I say will I succeed. I've been here far what seems like
Eternity. An yet I have nothing but me. Its been so long
Unfill hope for me seems hopeless.
Unless my success was
Being me.*

Love is the key so follow me

KEEPING OUR FAMILY GOING
ALSO KEEPS OUR HEARTS A FLOWING

*Be unselfish, take care of your
brothers & sisters, so that this
race can continue to flourish*

Life is sweet when were all together
This pot like our love
Strong forever

I DON'T WANT YOU
TO REMEMBER ME BY NAME I WANT YOU TO REMEMBER
THE PEACE AND LOVE I HAVE GAIN

*Everyone sees something different
Because it comes from his own self*

Yeah whateva
Fewer words are clever

DON'T RUSH TO GET OLD ...
LASTING FOREVER IS ALL
SOUL

*Remember The Past
Embrace The future*

A Conversation on Community Engagement, Race Dynamics and Visual Representations

Voices:

Claudia Mooney

Orron Kenyetta

The Dave Project was born from the Dave Drake pot featured in Theaster Gates's 2010 installation *To Speculate Darkly*. Dave's pot, and the inspiring story it contains, is relevant to various Milwaukee communities yet many of these did not frequent the art museum to see the piece. This phenomenon was not a reaction to the Dave pot but can instead be attributed to an array of factors, including the museum's location and the expense of visiting it.

I think there is an embedded resentment on both sides of the issue, in terms of how a museum looks at an underprivileged community, and how an underprivileged community might look at a museum.

When I was asked to lead the workshops I thought, “Okay, I’m a member of the black community. What’s my problem with the museum?” Mostly I feel like the museum does not speak to me. When I go to see exhibits, I’m always able to see my people and myself-- especially in anything American that I go see. And yet, at the same time, it’s rare that I feel the curator or the exhibit is actually speaking to me.

This is a fundamental issue in museum practice that is not unique to Milwaukee. The Dave Project was spurred by a belief that there is no reason to allow the limitations of the museum to act as a barrier between Milwaukee’s communities and its art, history, and culture.

I’ve come to learn, and I think it’s important for us all to keep in mind, that the thing about America is that everyone is equally important, regardless of what time you’re in. America is a variety of people and personalities. Sometimes it’s been my opinion that museums, or museum-like entities, try to take a topic and homogenize it, make it generic. If you come in with any vocabulary, or any sort of language that isn’t what’s being stated, it’s not considered. Alternatively, there is a way to engage and make things relevant. That is why I think we’ve been so successful with the Dave Project. I think it’s the ability to make the content relevant.

It became a lesson in curatorial practice and community engagement. The couplets collected, as well as the discussions that took place during the workshops, proved that involving communities in the interpretative process is mutually beneficial to the organization leading the workshops and the community members attending them. The workshops allowed for new understandings, but also presented unforeseen challenges.

I perceived how the community would look at me as a representative of this item or of this museum. I feel that each community, each group of people, each political interest deserves to have the museum made relevant for them. My participation was a way to make that happen.

I expected that there would be a degree of hostility in terms of how the work would be perceived. In particular, I expected a degree of hostility in how the great jug would be perceived by the African American community. A jug can very easily be perceived as a product of exploitation. I thought it would be a challenge to get people to see it as art or to see it as anything but a product of exploitation.

What about members from other communities? Would they also find it difficult to appreciate artistic power overcoming the harshest of environments and circumstances?

It was clear to me that you can make people uncomfortable with certain concepts. I don't mean uncomfortable where someone would walk out, but certainly [in the case of one of the workshops] if we were in any other place besides a church, a place where they worship, I don't think I would have had the same space for contemplation.

As we proceeded, the participants kind of reared their heads to a degree, but I think the power of the jug, and how we presented it, quickly overcame the stigmas that come with the first impression.

It was more than just the Dave pot. It was the STORY that won people over.

The experiences garnered from the Dave Project influenced the way that we view Dave's pots and emphasized the importance of the interpretive process. The interpretations infused the artwork with a new purpose.

In most people's minds art is for when you've made it and you don't have to work hard. You don't have anything else to do. It was important for me to let people know that the primary purpose of art is to heal. I was given that opportunity with the group from the Alma Center. I share an urban black male background with these men. I truly believe that

the purpose of art is to heal. Dave's poems are talking to the future. He was talking to us. He was talking to himself and future generations. He's talking to his great-grandchildren. He's trying to get them--like all great men do, especially when they're allowed to mature as Dave did--to get to a point where they see that it's more important to heal than to strike back. And the act of healing can then become, in itself, a form of fighting back.

Sometimes you hear artists say this just to sound deep, but truly I got more than I gave with the Dave project. I got more from our audiences than I gave. It's endless. Having had that experience has branched out into so many other things that I'm doing. I'm grateful for it.

One of the issues that audiences have raised with the Dave Project has been the way that the African American race has been historically portrayed. Our exhibition, *Face Jugs: Art and Ritual in 19th Century South Carolina*, approaches the same issue while exploring ceramic vessels made by slaves and later free African Americans in Edgefield, South Carolina during the second half of the nineteenth century.

A face jug is a stoneware vessel with eyes and teeth made out of fine white kaolin, a white river clay that is

an important ingredient in porcelain. The faces on the vessels have large wide-open eyes, big lips, big ears and bared teeth. Unfortunately the face jugs' origin and purpose has been lost with time. This may be partly due to the way they look. For those not aware that the face jugs were made by African Americans for African Americans, they appear to be racist images.

Let's start with the media. Media has been one of the ways that racism has been perpetuated. Think about the power of broadcast in the early days of TV. We can take America or at the same time we can take the Holocaust in Germany. Adolf Hitler was able to jade an entire nation against an entire race simply through propaganda. They dropped flyers from planes. In every movie the Jew was the bad guy. The Jew was the one that did everything wrong. Parallel to that has been the African American experience with cinema and the media. In the early days, the only time you saw a black person they were the personified version of what you see in the face jug.

Many racist caricatures illustrating African Americans in the 19th and early 20th century showed figures with ape-like characteristics.

All of the characters, all of the people who were successful, were the people who perpetuated these images. "Oh Lordy," they got the big lips! There's going to be a scene in the movie where he shakes his big lips because, you know, all black people have big lips. They always cast the guy with the big nose, and pronounced nasal bone. There was always a scene where they poked their eyes out, "the stupid nigger." That's what people see when they see the face jug.

The aversion to this sort of racist characterization can lead to a complete rejection of any imagery that appears racist, even if its purpose is not racist. The face jug's purpose, for example, is believed to hark back to a Kongo tradition brought over to America by enslaved people.

What's horrible about racism is that racism affects both sides. What's so dirty and nasty about racism, is that the person that racism is being pressed on also believes it to be true. To some degree they feel the need to represent the better part of the race. They feel they have to be protective of the racist image so long as they are living in that environment.

Although people may appear to disregard the influence that racism has had in their lives today, and condemn those that fall into racist stereotypes, they are still affected by the negative history.

Here's a contemporary example. I can sum it up in two words: Michael Jackson. If nothing else, he's a great example of everything a contemporary African American won't tell you. I hear people shit on Michael all the time.

"Look at what he did to his face. I don't understand that, he should be proud of himself." That's the conversation that people say in the open. I'm honest enough to tell you, because of the effects of my culture or the dominant culture in the country that I lived in, that if we had had Michael Jackson's resources, all of my elementary school friends and I would have done exactly what Michael Jackson did. It's that powerful. I had to learn to love my dark skin. I'm talking about as a man, not a kid. I didn't learn to love the way I looked until I was in my mid-20s. I used to sit and wish and dream that I could put creams on my face, and wish I wasn't black. This is horrible, but if I'm not honest about that, there's no way I can teach about where to go from here.

Aside from providing an entry point into a discussion about racial representations, face jugs are also an incredibly important component of the historic material culture of the South. As with Dave's pots, they represent some of the only surviving slave-made objects. A big difference, though, is that while Dave made his pots in a pottery to be presumably sold by his master, slaves made face jugs

in their free time for personal use. The topic of slavery needs to be addressed in order to productively discuss both Dave's pots and the face jugs.

At one library we were at for the Dave Project there was a group of middle-aged to elderly black women. There were three of them sitting in the front row. I know from experience that there's an age group of people who still have sensitivity to the subject of slavery. These were the people that marched with Dr. King. So, intentionally, I came in the door and said, "Okay, we're going to talk about slavery. Who's from the South?" And that's the way I began the workshop. I let them know we were going to talk about things that they were not comfortable with. I knew that it was a risky move. I've done it before, and I didn't get the same response. It's always different. They got up and walked out. They just didn't want to go there. I know that things like the face jug represent everything that black people struggle with in America.

The topic of slavery can be painful, even when speaking of Dave Drake, who was able to transcend his situation through the use of clay and language. Similarly, the face jugs are great art objects whose story can offer insight into the culture and beliefs of the people who made them.

*At another workshop one of the people in the group said:
“Dave was no artist. Dave was a slave.” So in that
moment we talked and there was some clarity on it. I
know that the comment wasn’t personal, but in a lot of
the classes both black and white people treat Dave like
he was ignorant. Words were misspelled, not because he
was a master of words and a poet, but because he didn’t
know any better. And that’s what underlies everything.
Part of what being an American is, is being sensitive or
knowledgeable of that part of the story.*

The effects of racism, discrimination and offensive portrayals are not limited to African Americans, a reality that makes these objects relevant to a broad group of people.

*There’s no denying that it effects everybody. But we
also must acknowledge that America has a caste system.
Things are not so much about black people anymore.
That’s why you find black people finding hope. Things
don’t have to be like that anymore. The way you ensure
this is by destroying all those images that remind you of
the time when it wasn’t so hopeful. That’s why those face
jugs are so powerful, and I don’t think that’s necessarily a
bad thing.*

*I know I made a spiritual connection with my heritage by
dealing with that Dave pot.*

Since many have felt a connection with Dave’s pot, it has encouraged us to continue bringing art, and the stories art has to tell, outside the museum walls. We believe that the concepts discussed in this book can be applied to any exhibition. To this end we have created a video that recreates the initial Dave Project and provides more opportunities for discussion.

*I think that a video that has as much soul and effort
poured into it as the project itself, as much attention to
detail, as much openness, and if the video is approached
the same way, in the sense that the presenter has just as
much to learn from the people looking at it, it will be
successful.*

There will also be an outreach component for future exhibitions, further ensuring that communities continue to have the opportunity to discuss and interpret artworks.

*Again, it has to be made relevant. I’ll share a secret
because I think it might be part of saving us as a whole.
My approach has always been to take down defenses.
People get upset because there’s shame associated with
a subject. You have to take those defenses down. My*

approach is to make people understand that there's no shame in what we're talking about. You have to be upfront with it. Going in with the Dave pot I already understood how the face jugs related. My approach with the pot would have been the same approach as with the face jugs.

When I think of it, I think that the process would be great. This is a good experience for anybody who's going to work with art, who's going to create art.

Going out to different parts of the community is not only an important way to get more people interested in art, but it provides an opportunity for community members to exercise their voice, and facilitates a reason for them to eventually visit the actual object. Although the issues touched upon in this section are invariably complex, they become less powerful, less likely to haunt us as misunderstood and forbidding phantoms, when they are discussed openly and honestly, out of curiosity and respect. As the conversations continue, we will all glean new insights and, in doing so, further scholarship on these objects and the people and stories around them.

A Face Jug



Face Jug, 1860-80. Alkaline-glazed stoneware with kaolin inserts. 6 5/8" x 5 1/8". (Courtesy, Chipstone Foundation; photography, Jim Wildeman.)

Fractures of Face Jugs

By Orron Kenyetta

if i were to lay them perfectly
one alongside the other and let them
stretch—
the bricks of broken promises
mortared by infected tears,
vanilla lovelies poured to crushed
loveless shards a come together
potion of preconceived notions
of the ways things should have been.
fractures from opposite sides of the vessel
struggles to make things fit.
the unity of unknown stones
the trilogy of tribalism where we feed'
the judas factor and wait to be betrayed
by a filthy and gluttonous man,
who stunk out his space but is easily defeated

by cleanliness.

like good manners and good diction
i'll garner exception by being
“...an pleasant smelling nigger...”

and even if i were to dwell on only
the best of things, would it be enough?
yes!

i live for the fact that the good weighs out
the bad.

the otherwise isn't wise if it had been
lived any other way.

the insteads are inbred nightmares
reflecting as signposts on the highway
out of noway.

nightmares, candle lighting opportunities
or alternates making nightmares
to dreams which are found among the things
that moves from one pallet to the next
til finally born to cherished realities
highlighted in red or raised surface (the ink of touch)
or to the humble hearer (ear reader) of the word spat.
those that dabble in spittle

drum fife and fiddle

and the mechanical movements of human spirit

at the wheel of human will casting vessels
of jesus judas the yin and yang of a rood-ed buddhist
wheels turning in the notion of motion
that brings water up from the well
liquid gold are liquid goals that applies
when the universe unfolds by hand expansion
in the house of many mansions
where at every bed there is a drawer which
contains a book.

perfectly placed by an angler of men
the parabolic hook
as men fish from the bridge of fantasy
and reality, content with not knowing
from which way they came
nor way they'd go.

will turning the elohim to the limit of kemet,
myriad of p's in parallel with the wheel
and the mound of clay waiting to come
to life in parallel to the stories in the

writing on the wall
will power was the name of the mythical
slave who spent time embodied in the
face jug. a single item from the laughing stock.
the mark of ceremony
was dotted in his eye
frozen in an expression
smuggled and preserved in mean
hearted mockery.

