56 Hannah Dr.

Asheville, NC 28804

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Graduation Project Committee

Buncombe County Early College

340 Victoria Road

Asheville, NC 28801

To Whom It May Concern:

I plan to research the history of slavery at the Smith-McDowell House. Specifically, I want to find out how exactly were Smith’s and McDowell’s slaves treated compared to the majority of slaves in WNC as well as across the South. My interest in this topic stems from the very roots of my racial identity. Having recently watched an extraordinary documentary on PBS, *The Abolitionists*, it occurred to me like never before how different my world would have been if was born upon this American soil almost a 150 years ago. Being a cross of black and white blood, I would have been stripped of my freedom, have had no access to education and worst of all I would have been treated as property. To think that all of my freedom would have been taken from me simply because of the inferior color of my skin makes me feel disgusted by what society looked like at the time. Just because slavery is probably one of the darkest chapters in our American history, it does not mean that we are to shy away from the facts. Instead, we are to embrace them, and be proud of the progress that has been made. Having taken and successfully completed two college level American history courses, I feel confident in my knowledge. I think that this project will provide me with a better insight of the different aspects that shaped the institution of slavery not only on the national level, but also on the state and local levels.

At first I wanted to learn more about slavery on national level, but I quickly realized that I already knew a lot about slavery on this level. Consequently, I decided to narrow my topic to the state level, until it occurred to me that my project would be even more interesting to a far greater audience of Western North Carolinians who knew little about the history of slavery in the mountains. Therefore, I decided that my research thesis would focus on the history of slavery at the Smith-McDowell House. Since the history of the house covers the Antebellum, Civil War and Reconstruction Periods, I hope to contrast the life of Smith’s and McDowell’s slaves against the slave life on the national, state and local levels. I plan to analyze original documents such the will of James McConnel Smith to potentially identify the treatment of slaves. Since I have access to the Holly Library located on A-B Tech campus, I am sure that I will find books that provide information on the issue of slavery on local, state and national levels. I also have internet access at home, so I should have no problems with online research.

As for my physical product, I plan to create a documentary on slavery in Western North Carolina with the incorporation of the story of George Avery, a former slave at the Smith McDowell House. I think that the time spent on editing the film will show that I even exceeded the expected fifteen hours. My mentor, Lisa Whitfield, is the education coordinator at the Smith-McDowell house, so she is definitely familiar with the known slave history of the House. Nonetheless, I do not think that she is the ultimate expert on the history of slavery in our region. Therefore, I am hoping to contact a professor in this field either from A-B Tech or UNCA. It might be that I will end up with two mentors. I definitely would use their assistance with finding the resources for my research. Moreover, I will interview them for the film. As for my materials, I will need a camera to conduct the interviews and then I will also need to use the iMovie software for editing. I am not sure; however, if I will actually be able to use the iMovie maker since I don’t have a Mac computer at home. This is somewhat of a problem for me because I am sure that class time will not be sufficient for the completion of this product.

I have already started volunteering at the Smith-McDowell House Museum. One of the things that I have done so far is that I helped my mentor set a Victorian tea party table, and although this activity does not directly relate to the whole issue of slavery, it does give me an idea of what the Southern aristocracy looked like at the time. I will also be volunteering on the days that they have special events. Nonetheless, the documentary itself will be ultimately one of the resources that they will find very useful for later education services. I definitely want my film be useful to other students or volunteers will be able to use in the future if their interests happen to be the same as mine. Ultimately, Lisa Whitfield will be signing a sheet that shows my volunteer hours.

I understand that plagiarism is not only illegal, but also unethical because it is the ultimate act of using someone’s hard work to satisfy personal laziness. It is important to recognize that one uses resources not to copy other people’s works, but to actually look at different ideas and formulate an original conclusion of the topic. There has to be a degree of originality when one writes a research paper. First of all, the most important aspect of writing a research paper is learning how effectively paraphrase a text. In fact, it is all about learning how to connect the ideas of different sources to formulate a paper that still has traces of original inference. Moreover, whenever one does use someone’s ideas and words, he or she needs to give credit those ideas through in-text citation. Overall, I understand that if I was in the position in which someone used the research that I have done, I would want to be given credit for and I would not want them copy and pasting my work.

Sincerely,

Nadiya Marrengulye