Black History Month Observed at David Library with Lecture that Explores  
“Slavery’s Slow Death” in New Jersey

***

WASHINGTON CROSSING, PA – February is Black History Month, and the David Library of the American Revolution will observe it this year by presenting a lecture, “Rethinking Slavery’s Slow Death in New Jersey” by James Gigantino II, Ph. D., on Wednesday, February 25 at 7:30 PM. The lecture will be held in Stone Hall at the David Library, 1201 River Road (Rt. 32) in Washington Crossing, PA, 1.3 mi. from the Washington Crossing Bridge. Admission is free, but reservations required, and can be made by calling 215.493-6776 ext. 100, or by sending an email to rsvp@dlar.org.

James Gigantino II is an Assistant Professor of History and an affiliated faculty member in African & African American Studies at the University of Arkansas. He earned his PhD from the University of Georgia in 2010. He is the author of The Ragged Road to Abolition: Slavery and Freedom in New Jersey, 1775-1865 and editor of The American Revolution in New Jersey: Where the Battlefront Meets the Home Front, to be released later this year. In 2011, he was awarded a residential research fellowship by the David Library in order to complete research on The Ragged Road to Abolition. His work has also been funded by grants and fellowships from the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Clements Library, New Jersey Historical Commission, and the American Historical Association.

Regarding his lecture on February 25, Professor Gigantino notes, “Contrary to popular perception, slavery persisted in the North well into the nineteenth century. This was especially the case in New Jersey, the last northern state to pass an abolition statute, in 1804. Because of the nature of the law, which freed children born to enslaved mothers only after they had served their mother's master for more than two decades, slavery continued in New Jersey through the Civil War.”

He says that abolition in New Jersey during the American Revolution was a contested battle, in which constant economic devastation and fears of freed blacks overrunning the state government limited their ability to gain freedom. “New Jersey's gradual abolition law kept at least a quarter of the state's black population in some degree of bondage until the 1830s,” explains Professor Gigantino. “The sustained presence of slavery limited African American community formation and forced Jersey blacks to structure their households around multiple gradations of freedom while
allowing New Jersey slaveholders to participate in the interstate slave trade until the 1850s.” This realization therefore shatters the perceived easy dichotomies between “free states” and “slave states” at the onset of the Civil War, as well as challenges common understanding of the impact of the American Revolution on the North.

The David Library is a non-profit educational institution dedicated to the study of American history circa 1750-1800. The Library is the repository of an unparalleled collection of primary sources on the era, and is open to the public Tuesday through Saturday 10 to 5. Professor Gigantino’s lecture is one of several scheduled between now and June. To see the full schedule, visit http://www.dlar.org/events.htm.

Black History Month, or National African American History Month, is an annual celebration of achievements by black Americans and a time for recognizing the central role of African Americans in U.S. history. The event grew out of “Negro History Week,” the brainchild of noted historian Carter G. Woodson and other prominent African Americans. Since 1976, every U.S. president has officially designated the month of February as Black History Month. Other countries around the world, including Canada and the United Kingdom, also devote a month to celebrating black history.

###