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Leonard Todd

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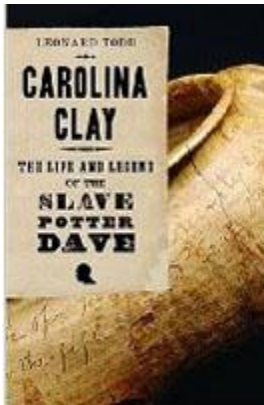
New Book

Carolina Clay: The Life and Legend of the Slave Potter Dave

By Leonard Todd

W.W. Norton & Co., Hardback, 320 pp., ISBN-13: 978-0393058567, October, 2008.

Description from the Publisher:



The compelling story of a slave, owned by the author's ancestors, who became one of the singular artists of the nineteenth century. He is known today, as he was then, only as Dave. His pots and storage jars were everyday items, but because of their beauty and massive size, and because Dave signed and inscribed many with poems, they now fetch six figures at auction. We know of no other slave artist who dared to put his name on his work, a dangerous advertisement of literacy.

Fascinated by the man and by this troubling family history, Leonard Todd moved from Manhattan to Edgefield, South Carolina, where his ancestors had established a thriving pottery industry in the early 1800s. Todd studied each of Dave's poems for biographical clues, which he pieced together with local records and family letters to create this moving and dramatic chronicle of Dave's life -- a story of creative triumph in the midst of slavery. Many of Dave's astounding jars are found now in America's finest museums.

From *Publishers Weekly* (Oct. 2008) -- The life of the slave potter Dave unfolds against a backdrop of cruelty, repression, war and unexpected tenderness in this intimate history. Little is known about Dave, whose stunning stoneware vessels are made more exceptional by the fact that he often inscribed verses, usually rhymed couplets, into their wet clay during the era when literacy among blacks was illegal and brutally punished. Driven by the chance discovery that his ancestors had enslaved Dave, Todd traveled to the heart of the antebellum South Carolina pottery industry to draw on local lore, archeological data, slave-era archival records and the famous verses to reconstruct Dave and his family's story. What emerges is not so much a definitive biography of Dave as a sweeping tale of the South itself and a touching testament to the artist. Given the paucity of records of Dave's life, much of Todd's account is speculative, with the author filling in the blanks with details taken from slave narratives, oral histories and popular literature of the era, and the book suffers from the author's penchant for imagining events, relationships and even thoughts and feelings on the basis of little documentation.