

AROUND TOWN

AROUND TOWN



Slaves of New York

A little-known chapter of NYC History is explored at the NYHS **By Nicole Blades**

Being keen and aware are practically prerequisites for living in this city. That's why Professor James Horton finds it puzzling that so many New Yorkers are shocked to learn that slavery was not only once present here but also prevalent. "I have to explain, 'Yes, the slave trade was not just in the South,'" says Horton, a professor of American studies and history at George Washington University. "It was vital and essential to the development of New York's economy."

With the moving and occasionally discomforting exhibit "Slavery in New York," now at the New York Historical Society, Horton hopes that the shroud of ignorance will start to lift. The \$5 million exhibit spans 9,000 square feet of the museum's first floor and includes multimedia presentations, computer stations, maps, paintings, and original artifacts and documents. It reveals the depth of this city's slave history while also acknowledging the profound impact enslaved people had on the making of New York and the United States.

In the making since early 2004, "Slavery" is the largest exhibit the society has put on in its 201-year history, eclipsing last year's blockbuster Alexander Hamilton show. Several individuals, supported

by a group of scholarly advisors, contributed to the program's curatorial vision, including Louise Mirrer, president of the NYHS; Richard Rabinowitz, curator, historian and president of American History Workshop; and chief historian Horton.

Although the idea for the show was a relatively recent one, its organizers point out that it was the result

"Historians have dug deeply into the history of the African presence in New York City."

of decades of historical research. "There have been generations' worth of really excellent scholarship," Rabinowitz explains. "Historians and archeologists have dug deeply into the history of the African and African-American presence in New York City." He notes that the 1991 rediscovery of an African burial ground for the city's 17th- and 18th-century slave population in lower Manhattan sparked a more intense institutional interest

in uncovering and examining more about this little-known aspect of New York's history.

Some scholars, however, believe that the NYHS could have delved deeper. "It's just too safe," says John Ehrenberg, head of the political science department at Long Island University's Brooklyn campus. "You need to talk about New York institutions' involvement in slavery that extends well after the Civil War—the wealthy, prominent New York families [and industries] that were entangled in slavery and made money from it well into the 1860s. That's an important story, and it wasn't told here."

Nevertheless, there's no denying the show's impact. Arranged chronologically, it spans from 1626, when the first Africans arrived here, to 1827, when the state proclaimed emancipation. The first gallery includes an overview of the Atlantic slave trade with a looped film and maps showing that for 400 years, an average of 80 Africans per day were brought over on a total of more than 40,000 ships. In another section, wire sculptures of slaves are formed to look as they did carrying a heavy load atop their heads or backs. Given the paucity of historical photographs depicting the misery of slave life, the sculptures leave an indelible impression.

Interactive monitors throughout the galleries give visitors the opportunity to explore the historical documents. One station allows you to examine financial ledgers and see that human beings were entered into the books the same way as bushels of wheat. Elsewhere, visitors can learn about the horrific living conditions endured by slaves, and the cruel laws used to control them.

The exhibit's final section is dedicated to the end of slavery and the face of the free black population in New York. "I think people will be surprised at the resourcefulness and the creativity of the black population coming out into freedom," Rabinowitz says. "Creating a whole parallel universe of churches, schools, fraternal organizations and benevolent societies in the early 19th century—that, to me, is one of the great untold stories of American history."

"Slavery in New York" is at the New-York Historical Society through March 5. See Museums.

Listings

IF YOU WANT TO BE LISTED

Submit information by mail, e-mail (aroundtown@timeoutny.com) or fax (646-432-3160) to **Erin Clements**. Include details of event, dates, times, address of venue with cross streets, nearest subways, telephone number and admission price, if any. **Deadline is 6pm on Monday, ten days before publication date.** Incomplete submissions will not be included, and listings information will not be accepted over the phone.

★=Recommended
KIDS=Kid-friendly

Thursday 3

Urban affairs

KIDS "Antique Native American Dolls"
FREE Molloy-Blitz Tribal, 594 Broadway between Houston and Prince Sts (212-219-9822). Subway: R, W to Prince St; 6 to Spring St. 11am–6pm. At least 40 dolls, created by more than 25 tribes and dating from 1830, are on display at Molloy-Blitz Tribal's inaugural exhibit.

"The Art of Jerry Garcia and Wavy Gravy"

FREE MicroCoSM Gallery, 540 W 27th St between Tenth and Eleventh Aves, fourth floor (212-594-2772, www.cosm.org). 11am–6pm. Paintings, drawings, prints and collages created by countercultural legends Jerry Garcia and Wavy Gravy are on display for your psychedelic pleasure.

"Conditions of Democracy: From Ancient Mesopotamia to Modern Iraq"

FREE NYU Hemmerdinger Hall, 100 Washington Sq East between Washington and Waverly Pls (212-998-6808). Subway: A, C, E, B, D, F, V to W 4th St. 4:30–6pm. NYU's Center for Ancient Studies hosts this conference, featuring speakers from NYU, Brown, the University of Texas and UC–Santa Barbara.

"The Cultural Legacy of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade"

FREE NYU King Juan Carlos I of Spain Center, 53 Washington Sq South between Sullivan and Thompson Sts (212-998-3650). Subway: A, C, E, B, D, F, V to W 4th St. 9am–5pm. Poems, drawings, memoirs and film scripts created by volunteers who served in the Abraham Lincoln Brigade during the Spanish Civil War are on display.

★KIDS "Designing the Taxi"

FREE Parsons The New School for Design, Tishman Auditorium, 66 W 12th St between Fifth and Sixth Aves (212-229-8919). Subway: L, N, Q, R, W, 4, 5, 6 to 14th St–Union Sq. 9am–9pm. Artists, designers, public officials, transportation experts and taxi-industry representatives present concepts for improving the NYC cab.

"Eighth Annual International Juried Botanical Art Exhibition"

FREE The Horticultural Society of New York, 128 W 58th St between Sixth and Seventh

AROUND TOWN ▶

Sports	64
Traffic jams	66
Any volunteers?	68
Street festivals	70
The light stuff	71
Museums	71
Kids	72