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Museum Developments in 2006

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Museum Developments in 2006

National Slavery Museum Fundraising Project

The United States National Slavery Museum (USNSM), planned for construction in Fredericksburg, Virginia, is "asking Americans to contribute \$8.00 or more to the construction of the only museum in our nation devoted exclusively to telling the story of American slavery; 8 is the shape both of shackles (the symbol of slavery) and, if turned on its side, of infinite freedom; 8 is an amount that allows every American to be a part of this incredible project; 8 will help remove shackles that have divided our nation and replace them with a new symbol for a united America." Additional news and information on development efforts for the USNSM are available on the Museum's web site, at: <http://www.usnationalslaverymuseum.org>.



Location Selected for Planned

National Museum of African American History and Culture



Earlier in 2006, the Smithsonian Institute's Board of Regents, the governing body of the Institution, announced the location for the new National Museum of African American History and Culture. The Regents selected the area of land known as the "Monument site," bounded by Constitution Avenue, Madison Drive, and 14th and 15th Streets N.W., in Washington, D.C. The site is adjacent to the Washington Monument and across the street from the National Museum of American History. Additional news and information on development efforts for this Museum are available on the Smithsonian web site, at: <http://nmaahc.si.edu/>.

Smithsonian "Exclusive Access" Controversy

The National Coalition for History (NCH) reports in its November, 2006 newsletter that controversy continues over the Smithsonian Institution's agreement of exclusive access by the Showtime entertainment company to the Institute's collections for the purposes of creating documentaries. Such an arrangement would presumably impact access to ethnographic and historical collections on African, African-American, and African diaspora cultures. The NCH, available online at <http://www.h-net.org/~nch/>, reports:

"In the wake of the recent controversy over the Smithsonian Institution's (SI) exclusive and confidential agreement with Showtime, and recognizing that a new Congress presents new opportunities to derail the controversial agreement, a group of concerned historians, scholars, filmmakers, and others recently sent a letter to Congress demanding action."

"The Business Ventures unit of the Smithsonian Institution has been under scrutiny for some time now regarding accounting and management issues. However the contract entered between the SI and Showtime dramatically increased public criticism. The letter to relevant Congressional appropriations and oversight committees notes that the Smithsonian Institution has been under attack by scholars and film makers since entering into a controversial contract that grants the Showtime Network certain exclusive rights to the Institution's staff, collections, and archives. The letter states that while the details of the contract are unknown, it has been established that it includes a '30-year term, a non-competitive procurement' and that organizations such as PBS and the History Channel (to name but two), are all viewed as 'competitive,' and hence the contract impacts their and other independent film makers potential access to the Smithsonian for programs they wish to produce."

"For months, the Smithsonian has steadfastly refused to release the terms of the contract or address the concerns and criticism to the satisfaction of critics. The letter notes that SI officials have also not responded to questions from the Senate Finance Committee, the House Appropriations Committee or the House Committee on Administration. While Congress has authorized the Government Accountability Office (GAO) to conduct a study, the draft report remains confidential as well."

"The letter calls on Congress to take action and shed light on the Smithsonian Showtime deal. At the very least, the contract 'should be made available to the public and reforms could be instituted that would allow for increased dialogue and consultation with the public before a contract is agreed upon.' With the House and Senate set to convene to discuss bills left to be conferenced, there is an opportunity to amend bills that limit public access to contracts. To view the letter, visit http://public.resource.org/smithsonian_congress.html."