

A Dutch libraries follow-up to formal apologies for historical slavery and enslavement

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Abstract:

Starting point is the idea of a Legacy Project, in which the temporary event of the conference leaves a lasting legacy in its host city of Rotterdam.

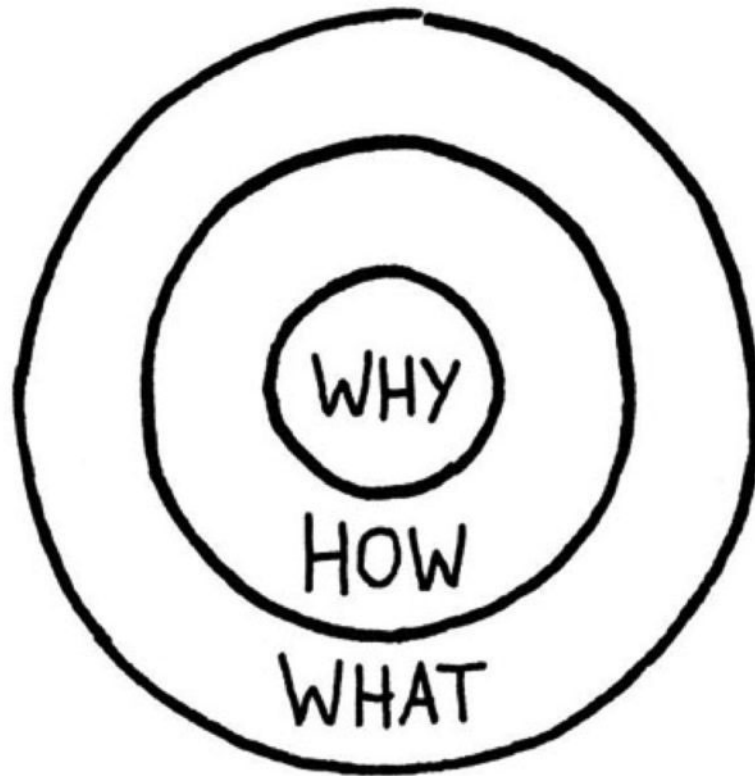
On December 19th 2022, the Dutch government offered formal apologies for the Dutch role in the history of slavery and enslavement, defining it as a crime against humanity. This was meant to be the beginning of a reconciliatory process in Dutch society.

The document proposes the development of an educational project for schools, produced by a coalition of scientific and public libraries and archives in co-creation with organizations of descendants. The paper states clearly why libraries are the right institutions to perform this task. In short, the reasons are to be found in legal and policy foundations, in libraries being accustomed to management and transfer of knowledge to the general public and in the strong bonds between libraries and (primary and secondary) education.

The initiative is being built on a few good practices, executed by the Rotterdam Public Library and by the Brooklyn Public Library. Both examples take original historical documents as examples and highlight their incredible content as a starter of conversation. Goal of the educational program is to inform about slavery and enslavement history, its lasting effects in today's society and the why of apologies. For many citizens and pupils the discussion is merely an (amazing and sometimes annoying) feature in the news and the program aims to make large groups in society understand why this is and to counter contemporary abuses resulting from this piece of history.

Follow-up will be that the creation of the educational program will start after the WLIC 2023 conference.

Keywords: Educational project on historic enslavement.



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Why

Origin and reasoning of the formative idea.

The WLIC Conference 2023 is taking place in The Netherlands, in Rotterdam, from august 21-25th. In the week preceding the conference, the city is hosting a side program that focusses on a divers range of subjects and topics. The challenging (originally Danish)

idea is that an in itself temporary event as a conference can leave a positive and more lasting footprint in the city where it is held. For Rotterdam, being one of the most diverse communities of the country, it seems logical to find a connection with that feature.

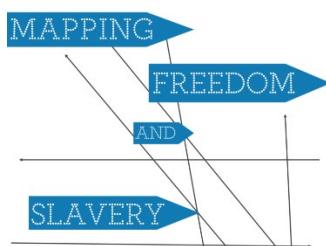
Diversity and current debate in The Netherlands.

One of the subjects in this field, that currently attracts a lot of attention in public debate in The Netherlands, is the abolishment of enslavement in 1863, only 160 years ago. Enslavement was/is a crime against humanity that was practised for centuries by the Dutch, in a colonial context. For the descendants of enslaved people, the implications reach into their present day welfare and wellbeing through mechanisms of inequality and prejudice. Rotterdam is home to large groups of inhabitants, originating from former Dutch colonies, with such backgrounds and problems.

Connection to (inter)national library policy.

Scientific libraries and archives are places that stockpile historical resources and other written sources (either in print or digital), often with roots in legislation. Their role in contributing to the debate, as centres of knowledge, is therefore of utmost importance and clarity.

Example of reasoning: page from the Brooklyn Public Library website.



Why Study Freedom and Enslavement in Your Community?

Slavery in the United States was absolutely foundational, and remnants of its legacy are found in all aspects of daily life: from the currency we use to the streets we live on, and to ongoing structures of oppression that continue to define dominant aspects of black life in this country, and to limit and harm all communities.

We hope that all who use this curriculum come away with the confidence to explore the connections between the past and our present political, economic, social, and culture issues and to use the skills and histories learned here to make change.

Public libraries around the world are increasingly becoming agents of promoting the realization of the UN's 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's), one of them being "reduced inequalities". For Dutch public libraries, this goal would fit perfectly in

program lines on “(digital) civil society”. Moreover, Dutch public libraries play a legal role as community centres, promoting debate, democracy and inclusiveness as well as knowledge of art & culture.

How

The Dutch national context.

The debate in Dutch society on enslavement in its former colonies and the role of Dutch merchants, has recently gained momentum, focusing on question around the issue of apologies. Whether apologies should be offered was already a matter settled. Questioning was around whom should apologize to whom, what the implications of apologies would or should be, and how apologies would fit into a process involving descendants of formerly enslaved people. Among certain degrees of discontent, the prime minister formally apologized on december 19th 2022 and stated that his speech was the beginning of a reconciliation process. The event that is proposed in this paper, preceding the WLIC 2023 conference, fits into this reconciliatory line.



Uniting and directing networks to a common goal.

The logical conclusion from all this imagery must be that libraries are in a perfect position, in using their collections, organising skills and public networks, to schedule the debate. A coalition of scientific libraries, working together with archives and museums on the one hand, and public libraries, with their footage in society and accessibility to the general public on the other hand, is perfectly suited to work on overcoming the longterm negative effects of historical enslavement in contemporary society. By means of promoting awareness by disclosing origins and unveiling and countering patterns of inequality. Aiming to help improve situations and counterbalancing today’s problems that result from historical enslavement. A challenge that in itself connects to the fundamental reasons of existence of libraries, most certainly of public libraries.

What

Scattered programming

The Dutch role in enslavement currently acquires a lot of public attention and debate in the country. It is therefore logical that the disclosure of historical resources and the publishing of books on the subject has been, and still is, booming. Registers of freed enslaved persons are being published online. National TV schedules programs on the genealogical background of wellknown Dutch with enslaved ancestors. Historical

scientists wrote essays and books from different angles and perspectives and discussed these in talkshows, debating about their views. Political parties differed in opinion on the apologies and their (financial) follow-up. Funds are available for a National Museum on Enslavement History and for developing wider range of activities around the subject.

Scientific libraries play a role mainly in the disclosure of sources and in promoting historical research. Public libraries have, until now, mostly done some scattered programming in this field, as part of their historical lecturing. The celebrations around the 150 years abolishment anniversary, this year, the so called Keto Koti, has given rise to more attention of public libraries in their programs and on their websites.

Keti Koti Dialogotafel - Herdenkingsjaar slavernijverleden

21 Juni 2023, van 19:00 tot 21:00 | de Bibliotheek het Eemhuis
Kosten: Gratis

i Deze activiteit heeft in het verleden plaatsgevonden. Klik [hier](#) voor alle actuele activiteiten.

Waarom zijn boeken van zwarte auteurs ondergewaardeerd? Samen zullen we verkennen waarom de literatuur van zwarte auteurs niet altijd de erkenning krijgt die het verdient in het curriculum van middelbare scholen. Deze avond nemen we de tijd om dieper in te gaan op deze kwestie, om inzichten te verwerven, vooroordelen te onderzoeken en te streven naar een inclusiever Literatuurlijst.

De impact van literatuur op onze perceptie van het verleden is onbetwistbaar. Het opent een venster naar onze geschiedenis, maar tegelijkertijd roept het de vraag op of dit beeld, gezien het gebrek aan literatuur van schrijvers uit voormalige kolonies, rechtvaardig is.

Tijdens deze bijeenkomst zullen we samen aan de hand van de Literatuurlijst voor het voortgezet onderwijs

Given the opportunities of the reconciliatory situation and the acknowledgement of societal urgency, the proposed WLIC 2023 contribution is meant to help change this scattered programming into a more structural approach.

Good practices: Rotterdam and Brooklyn (NYC).

Following the apologies of the Rotterdam mayor, the Rotterdam public library has scheduled a comprehensive program around enslavement history, motivated by the libraries focus on inclusiveness. An element is the program “Verhalen van de stad” (Stories of the City) which consists of a course of nine lessons on colonial- and enslavement history in East and West, as well as a workshop on family history research, a conversation between generations for women of Indonesian descent and several thematic exhibitions. Again driven by inclusiveness, the library has invited citizens from a diversity of backgrounds to take part in the collecting of titles on the subject, which are displayed as a series of expositions throughout the year 2023-2024.

In all this the library cooperates with an external partner, a foundation called “Gedeeld Verleden Gezamenlijke Toekomst (Shared Past, Common Future, GVGTT), that bridges the gap between scientific research and applied activism. Other activities of the said foundation are to provide training on diversity awareness, for instance for civil servants, and lessons for secondary schools, that start with the examination of historical enslavement records.

The New York district of Brooklyn is home to a very diverse community, for which the history of slavery and enslavement is highly relevant. The Center for Brooklyn History aims to “democratize the study and experience of Brooklyn’s history to meet the needs of the borough’s many diverse communities through expanded collections and engaging programming”. The Center became part of Brooklyn Public Library in 2020, to the great advantage for her outreach capacity.

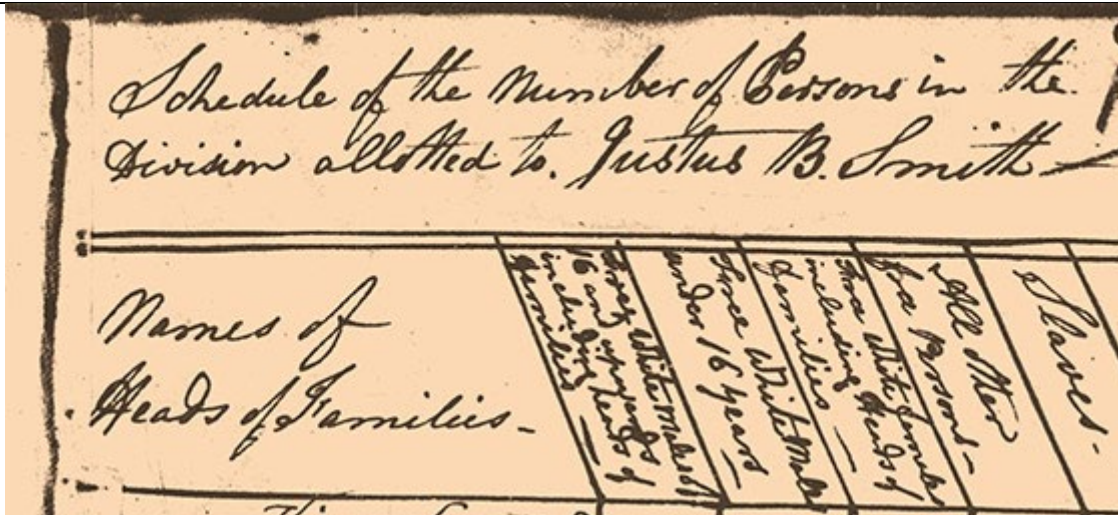


**Guide to the Queens County, N.Y. enslaved people bills of sale
1978.010**

Descriptive Summary

Title:	Queens County, N.Y. enslaved people bills of sale
Dates [inclusive]:	1751-1793
Abstract:	This collection contains bills of sale for the purchase of enslaved people of the Wyckoff Family of Queens County, as well as John Van Wyck.
Quantity:	0.08 Linear Feet in one folder.
Text [Box]:	A0074
Call Phrase:	1978.010
Sponsor:	This collection was processed and described as part of the project, "The Gladys Kriebel Delmas Foundation."

Next to the opening up of collections, it programs series of public talks on emancipatory and minority issues as well as a broad range of educational programs, with tutorials for teachers, f.i. on enslavement and on the US abolitionist movement.



Mapping Freedom and Enslavement

Using primary sources, Mapping Freedom and Slavery helps students study the history of slavery and abolition in Brooklyn and to learn about Black-led institutions and organizations of the late-18th and early-19th century. Find it [here](#).

The Brooklyn Public Libraries website hosts pages about the black resistance to systematic racial injustice, under the title “Brooklyn Resists”, that make utmost clear how this as a mechanism is linked to the enslavement of earlier days.

When slavery ended, racism remained. Housing discrimination segregated Black people into a handful of areas. As Black populations skyrocketed in the 1950s, '60s, and '70s, housing discrimination caused overcrowding in central Brooklyn, which deteriorated conditions in Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brownsville, Ocean Hill, and parts of Crown Heights. Schools suffered. Buildings crumbled. Trash accumulated. Poverty increased. From the 1970s through the '90s, when crime levels increased in Black communities, Black people were stereotyped as criminals. Law enforcement overpoliced and underprotected Black Brooklyn.

**BROOKLYN
RESISTS**

The next move: a preceding meeting on the exchange of knowledge and experience.

The WLIC 2023 Conference in Rotterdam, precisely because of its international character, can be the platform and opportunity to host the libraries follow-up to the Dutch government formal apologies and catalyze joint efforts to make a meaningful contribution in this respect. The projected result is the formation of a “coalition of the willing”, of Dutch scientific and public libraries that realize an educational program on enslavement awareness, that can be run by all public libraries of the country together with allied secondary schools. It would be very helpful to align the effort with international libraries that have experience in this field. Indispensable are institutions like archives and museums, that can provide primary resources. An absolute necessity is involvement of descendants of enslaved people, in the form of organisations around the topic on the Dutch mainland as well as descendants living in the Dutch Caribbean Islands.

Funds can be raised from specific government funding institutions with regard to the apologies year program.

BHAG

The aim of the proposed event is to settle a coalition of libraries that, in cocreation with descendants and institutions, will realize and carry out dedicated and goal-oriented educational programs that aim to nullify the enduring negative effect of historical enslavement, in The Netherlands and in other nations around the globe.

Date, place and time: Rotterdam, Central Public Library, Hoogstraat 110, 3011 PV Rotterdam. Desiderius room, 1^e floor, august 16th 2023, 15.00 – 17.00.

Time	Subject	Speaker
15.00 – 15.05	Opening	
15.05 – 15.15	Introduction	Luc Pruijn, project initiator
15.15 – 15.30		Corrine Lampen, City Archives Rotterdam
15.30 – 15.45		Eline Rademakers, GDVD
15.45 – 16.00		Djounie Anton, Public Library Rotterdam
16.00 - 16.15	Short break	
16.15 - 16.45		Heather Malin, Brooklyn Public Library
16.45 – 16.55	Follow-up	Luc Pruijn, project initiator
16.55 - 17.00	Closing	