



Office of General Services

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OGS OBSERVES BLACK HISTORY MONTH WITH SERIES OF FREE EXHIBITS & EVENTS AT THE EMPIRE STATE PLAZA

Black History Month Cultural Expo and Vendor Fair on February 8

RoAnn M. Destito, New York State Office of General Services (OGS) Commissioner, announced the State's 2017 Black History Month observance at the Empire State Plaza will highlight the importance of New York as a prime destination for African Americans seeking a better life. This month-long observance will feature a cultural expo and vendor fair, a panel discussion on the Great Migration, and an art exhibit.

"This month offers us an excellent opportunity to place a spotlight on the facets of American history that tell the story of black Americans' struggles and triumphs and how their significant contributions have made New York the great state it is today," Commissioner Destito said. "Governor Cuomo has encouraged New Yorkers to learn more about the important and positive roles African Americans have had in our state's history, and these Black History Month exhibits and events make it possible for visitors to the Empire State Plaza to be educated and entertained at the same time."

Rose Harvey, Commissioner of the Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, said: "The celebration of Black History at the Empire State Plaza is one way New York State is advancing recognition of our diverse heritage. I encourage New Yorkers to attend these events to learn more about the ways African-American people have shaped the history of New York State."

"We are honored to share a replica of the Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation for the public to view at the state's Black History Month Cultural Expo and Fair," said Board of Regents Chancellor Betty A. Rosa. "This historic document presents a unique opportunity for adults and children to reflect on our nation's past and to celebrate the progress we've made and the goals we continue to work toward. During Black History Month we recognize and thank African Americans for the innumerable sacrifices and contributions they have made to our nation."

"The Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation, written by President Abraham Lincoln, is a treasured item in the New York State Library's collections," said State Education Commissioner MaryEllen Elia. "This extraordinary document represents a historic moment in the nation's path to abolish slavery. As we commemorate Black History Month in February, we

reflect on the words of President Lincoln and honor the achievements of African Americans and their contributions to our country. We are proud to partner with the Office of General Services to display a replica of the Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation at the Black History Month Cultural Expo for the public to view and learn from.”

The Black History Month exhibits and events will be held throughout the month of February and are free and open to the public.

Art Exhibit

The exhibit outside the Empire State Plaza Visitor Center and Gift Shop features four paintings and one mosaic from the New York State Harlem Art Collection and a mural titled *Harriet Tubman and the Underground Railroad*. The Harlem Art Collection, which is overseen by OGS, was created in 1976 and originally housed in the Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. Harlem State Office Building. The collection contains more than 100 works by nearly 80 artists who lived or worked in Harlem.

The mural, *Harriet Tubman and the Underground Railroad*, was created in September 2016 by students from the Monroe Community College Art Department in Rochester for the 10th Biennial Global Mural Conference. The symbols on the mural represent ones that were used by the Railroad to signify safe houses, waterways, trails, and roads.

Black History Month Cultural Expo and Vendor Fair

On Wednesday, February 8, from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., the expo and fair will be held on the Empire State Plaza’s south concourse, closest to the Madison Avenue entrance, and feature a replica of the Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation provided by the New York State Library, an exhibit on the Schuyler Flatts Burial Ground Project, which offers a unique view of slavery in the Capital Region, craft vendors, Jamaican soul food, community organizations, as well as performances and presentations by:

- Jordan Taylor Hill, an artist, performer, DJ, and African drumming instructor.
- Badara Matar, a drummer and owner of Nine Steps Away to Africa.
- The Young Abolitionists, Underground Railroad History Project of the Capital Region, a group of young adults who will perform reenactments in period costumes that focus on life in mid-19th century America.
- Abrookin Career and Technical Center Cosmetology Program. Students from the program will present a theatrical spoken word and fantasy hair styling show that highlights the importance of African-American hairstyles and culture throughout black history in America.
- Jon Lajas, a dancer and musician at the Albany Community Charter School who will tap dance with his students.

Special thanks to Mildred Elley for its support of this program.

Panel Discussion “Remembering the Great Migration”

On Wednesday, February 22 from 5:30 to 8 p.m. in the Empire State Plaza's south concourse, this panel discussion will focus on the local stories of the historic Rapp Road Community, which was settled during the Great Migration of millions of African Americans from the American South to the industrialized Northeast during the 1900s.

Participants will include master of ceremonies Paul Grondahl, an Albany Times Union staff writer and award-winning journalist and author; moderator Cordell Reaves, a historic preservation program analyst with the New York State office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation; and panelists:

- Jennifer Lemak, a curator and author from the New York State Museum who has focused her research on the migration of South African Americans to New York State.
- Stephanie Woodard, a descendent of the Rapp Road Community and member of the Rapp Road Historical Association.
- Dina Ranelluccia, a descendent of the Rapp Road Community and member of the Rapp Road Historical Association.
- Marsha Mortimore, a historian and lecturer of African-American history in the Capital District.

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