

Posters highlighting NYC slavery sites ripped down, They were put up in Lower Manhattan

By Stacey Sager

(Lower Manhattan - WABC, June 2, 2006) - There is a nasty battle involving some local high school students who put up posters in Lower Manhattan to identify where slave-related events happened back in the 1800s. The battle is between the students and a downtown business group that ripped the posters down. The group says they're illegal.

These high school students in Cambria Heights thought they were getting a lesson in the history of slavery here in New York. But now, it's turned into a lesson in civics and free speech. It seems their class project -- a walking tour including posters at 11 different sites deemed historic in terms of slavery -- were taken down by the alliance for downtown New York. The students are floored and disappointed. Celeste Rimple, 12th grader: "Slavery, as bad as it is, was a part of New York's history and it should be noted, should be recognized. So I was sad people would want to hide it. People should embrace everything about your history, good or bad."

But the Downtown Alliance explains that putting up posters on the city's infrastructure is simply illegal. Joseph Timpone, Downtown Alliance: "If this is some kind of educational program, we would certainly be obliged to help them in any way we can. But they can't put posters on city infrastructure."

The walking tour included places like City Hall, where New York's mayor back in 1861, actually wanted to secede from the union and support the South. And at Foley Square in 1741, slaves were actually executed. But the tour also highlighted certain banks and businesses, from Wall Street to South Street, where profits were made on slavery years ago.

And so, the students tell us, they wonder if that was the real reason the Downtown Alliance took them down. Jennifer Caroccio, 12th grader: "And we think that their reason for taking it down was it was bad for business." They also say if anyone should have cleaned these up, it should have been the city's Sanitation Department. The Downtown Alliance says they did the students a favor because sanitation could have fined them for the violations. Meanwhile, the students say they'll keep fighting.

Alan Singer, Curriculum Editor: "The kids have already decided that next year we'll have human posters." The Downtown Alliance is vowing to help the students design something more permanent than posters in the future.

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Slavery posters causing uproar

NEW YORK CITY, N.Y., June 2 (UPI) -- Some New York high school students are voicing displeasure over removal of slavery posters placed to commemorate certain sites. As part of a school project, the students placed posters at locations of major significance to the slave trade. But the posters were removed by the Alliance for Downtown New York. Alliance spokesperson Bruce Brodoff told Newsday the removal was part of the group's goal to "keep downtown free of graffiti and illegal fliers." The students from Law, Government and Community Service Magnet High School disagreed. "There are no memorials to the victims of slavery in New York. When the Downtown Alliance took down our posters, they were erasing slavery from history again", senior Osele Clifford told the newspaper. Alliance President Eric Deutsch said he is willing to discuss the creation of markers to recognize the history of slavery.

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