

Historic Hudson Valley Unveils Groundbreaking Interactive Graphic Novel: ‘Kofi’s Fire’

New digital project brings to life story of the 1741 “New York Conspiracy,” sheds light on Black experience in colonial New York

Sleepy Hollow, NY (May 23, 2024) — The Sleepy Hollow-based education non-profit Historic Hudson Valley is launching *Kofi’s Fire*, an interactive graphic novel based on the true story of the "New York Conspiracy of 1741" and Kofi, an enslaved man who was accused of being one of the ringleaders of the uprising.

Kofi, who was enslaved by the merchant Philipse family and is linked with the history of Philipsburg Manor, a National Historic Landmark in Sleepy Hollow, N.Y., was charged with being one of the instigators of a supposed plot that resulted in the arrest of nearly two hundred colonists, most of them enslaved men and women, who were accused of conspiring to set fire to Manhattan in a bid for power and freedom. As many as forty enslaved people were executed for their alleged role in the conspiracy.

Drawing from trial transcripts, contemporary letters, and newspaper accounts, this fictionalized account brings the gripping story of the revolt and Kofi’s trial to vivid life with accessible storytelling, vibrant art, and user-driven, interactive elements. Additionally, *Kofi’s Fire* depicts the Black and immigrant community in colonial New York with all the sensitivity and scholarship that is the hallmark of Historic Hudson Valley’s approach to the story of Northern slavery.

The digital experience, complete with lesson plans and other tools for 7th-12th grade teachers to use in Social Studies and ELA classrooms, allows readers to experience life in colonial New York, hear from members of Kofi’s community, bear witness to the injustices of enslavement, and celebrate their courage and perseverance. The graphic novel serves not only as a valuable resource for students, but for anyone interested in understanding the complexities of slavery in the colonial North.

"This innovative project tackles the critical need for accessible, accurate resources about the history of slavery in our region," said Dr. Elizabeth Bradley, vice president of programs and engagement at Historic Hudson Valley. "By sharing the story of Kofi and the events of the '1741 New York Conspiracy,' we aim to educate and engage a wider audience about this often-neglected chapter in our nation's past."

Kofi’s Fire builds on Historic Hudson Valley’s 25 years of experience presenting the history of enslavement to school and public audiences in ways designed to increase empathy and understanding. The organization has shared the story of slavery in the colonial North through public and school tours at Philipsburg Manor since 1999, supported by guidance from its African American Advisory Board and distinguished faculty advisors. In 2019, the organization added to its digital education footprint by

producing the award-winning digital interactive documentary, *People Not Property* (hudsonvalley.org/peoplenotproperty).

“We are honored to have received critical funding from the National Endowment for the Humanities to create this important resource,” said Dr. Bradley. “And we are grateful to have worked with the guidance of scholars such as Leslie Harris, professor in the Department of History at Northwestern University and author of *Slavery in New York*; Hassan Jeffries, associate professor of African American history at Ohio State University and author of *Bloody Lowndes: Civil Rights and Black Power in Alabama's Black Belt*; and Jill Lepore, professor of American History at Harvard University and author of *New York Burning: Liberty, Slavery and Conspiracy in Eighteenth-Century Manhattan*.”

Historic Hudson Valley worked closely with Blue Telescope, an award-winning interactive design firm, to launch this ambitious project. Blue Telescope provided design, development, and media production expertise, and a dedicated, Black-led creative team, including author Deirdre Hollman (founder of Black Comics Collective), illustrator Velicia Gourdin, creative designer Reese Patillo, and creative director William "GoodWill" Ellis, who helped steer the project's creative vision.

The website is available to the general public for free at hudsonvalley.org/kofisfire. Visitors to The Pinkster Festival on Saturday, May 25, can also experience the website on-site in the Visitor Center at Philipsburg Manor in Sleepy Hollow.

This project was made possible in part by the National Endowment for the Humanities: Democracy Demands Wisdom. Any views, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this Web resource, do not necessarily represent those of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

About Historic Hudson Valley

Historic Hudson Valley, Westchester County's largest cultural organization, welcomes hundreds of thousands of visitors every year through school programs, tours of National Historic Landmarks, and large-scale events like The Great Jack O'Lantern Blaze®. From its lower Hudson Valley base of operations, the organization focuses on delivering quality educational and entertaining experiences, striking a balance between tradition and vision, from preserving the past, to contextualizing it in creative ways for 21st-century audiences.

About the National Endowment for the Humanities

Created in 1965 as an independent federal agency, the National Endowment for the Humanities supports research and learning in history, literature, philosophy, and other areas of the humanities by funding selected, peer-reviewed proposals from around the nation. Additional information about the National Endowment for the Humanities and its grant programs is available at: www.neh.gov.