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"THE COLOR OF MONEY"

CONFEDERATE CURRENCY BILLS CELEBRATED SLAVERY

Plattsburgh, N.Y. -- An artist who rediscovered the images of slaves decorating pre-Civil War Southern state currency is bringing his vibrant exhibit of bills and new paintings to Plattsburgh on Feb. 20.

John W. Jones, a South Carolina artist and commercial illustrator, discovered the images of slavery when a collector brought a Confederate bill into his shop to be enlarged. He was struck by the power of the imagery -- a virtual declaration of the South's reliance on slaves to make the economy work -- and decided to bring this story to a broader audience.

Jones's presentation is being co-sponsored by the Plattsburgh State Gospel Choir, which will also perform several songs, and the North Star Underground Railroad Historical Association. Dr. Dexter Criss, director of the Gospel Choir, said the Choir traditionally offers a special performance in honor of Black History Month. This year, the Choir will perform three traditional spirituals: "I Open My Mouth to the Lord," "Ole Time Religion," and "Soon I Will Be Done."

The program will start at 4 p.m. at the Angell Center Ballroom on the SUNY Plattsburgh campus.

His full-color, dramatic paintings vividly show the drawings that were embedded on Southern state currency, with images of slaves picking cotton, loading wagons, and more. Paintings will be on display in the ballroom that day.

Jones argues that the images in mass circulation demonstrate how central slavery was to the Southern economy, and to the Confederate cause.

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"You hear all these politicians and people who support flying the Confederate flag saying, ' Oh, it's only state's rights.' Oh, it's state's rights all right. State's rights meant it was all right to keep slaves," Jones told the Boston Globe.

In 2014, the murder of nine individuals at a leading black church in Charleston, SC, by a white man espousing racist rhetoric led that state's governor and other political leaders to remove the Confederate flag from the statehouse grounds.

"We are very excited to bring this special program to Plattsburgh, and give folks in the North Country a look at forgotten history," said Jackie Madison, president of the North Country Underground Railroad Historical Association.

Tickets are \$10 for adults and \$5 for students.

Seating will be limited. To reserve tickets and for further information, please contact 518-834-5180, or ugr@frontier.com.

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