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## **National Postal Museum Announces New Exhibition Opening** *Exhibition Devoted Entirely to African American History*

“Freedom Just Around the Corner: Black America from Civil War to Civil Rights,” opening Feb. 12 at the Smithsonian’s National Postal Museum, is the museum’s first exhibition devoted entirely to African American history. Marking 150 years since the end of the Civil War and the abolition of slavery throughout the United States, the exhibition chronicles the African American experience through the perspective of stamps and mail.

The exhibition includes letters carried by enslaved Americans, mail sent by and to leaders of the civil rights movement and original artwork for numerous stamps issued by the United States Postal Service. More than 100 items from the museum’s collection are on display, augmented by outstanding pieces on loan from other institutions and private collections.

“The exhibition is powerful and presents a distinctive perspective to the history that unfolded during this important period of time,” said Allen Kane, director of the museum. “Our hope is that visitors will learn more about this historic period, connect emotionally to the stories and objects we are presenting and continue to have meaningful conversations beyond the museum visit.”

Before the introduction of home mail delivery, slaves often carried letters to and from the post office. Slave-carried mail was usually identified by a notation—called an endorsement—that also served as a travel pass. These mail messengers could be an important source of news if they overheard discussions during their travels. Slaves sometimes carried letters directly to the recipient, bypassing the postal system entirely. This was often the case when the letter was accompanied by a parcel, since post offices did not handle domestic package mail until 1913.

The exhibition, in part, presents examples of slave-carried mail, including one carried by a slave named Susan, dated April 17, 1850, with the message, “I send to you my negro girl Susan aged 16 all rite and a first rate girl big limbs and muscles please sell her and remit...”

Susan was probably unaware that the letter she carried to the Eastville, Va., post office contained arrangements for her to be sold to a slave dealer in Richmond.

Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech was commemorated in the Postal Service's Celebrate the Century stamp series issued at the end of the 20th century. Original artwork for the stamp, by Keith Birdsong, reflects a trace of brightness on the horizon to represent hope, while King wears the March's official badge, in one of many stunning paintings on display from the Postal Service's Black Heritage stamp series. Most of the artwork is exhibited for the very first time.

"'Freedom' provides a unique take on African American history, exploring the subject through stamps and mail," said Daniel Piazza, exhibit curator. "We hope this approach inspires new audiences to visit the National Postal Museum and William H. Gross Stamp Gallery."

Selected pieces in the exhibition will include interpretation presented through audio recordings of curators, conservators and guest speakers, adding significance to individual objects. A special [website](#) and catalog will augment the exhibition as well, providing additional access to the rich content presented.

The National Postal Museum is devoted to presenting the colorful and engaging history of the nation's mail service and showcasing one of the largest and most comprehensive collections of stamps and philatelic material in the world. It is located at 2 Massachusetts Avenue N.E., Washington, D.C., across from Union Station. The museum is open daily from 10 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. (closed Dec. 25). For more information about the Smithsonian, call (202) 633-1000 or visit the museum website at [www.postalmuseum.si.edu](http://www.postalmuseum.si.edu).

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