

THE LOWER

MANHATTAN

SIGN

PROJECT

June 27, 1992 - June 30, 1993



"1992 ¿The Americas?"

A COLLABORATIVE PUBLIC ART PROJECT

In 1990, four organizations – the Bronx Council on the Arts, the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council, the Snug Harbor Cultural Center, and Socrates Sculpture Park – all dedicated to bringing new art to the broadest possible audiences, joined together to create a pilot project to explore ideas of art, history and identity in relationship to the Columbus quinqucentennial celebrations of 1992.

Three factors motivated this collaborative project:

The creation of thematic and curatorial cohesion among four organizations with different curatorial approaches and methods, and with very different venues;

The possibility of combining fundraising and marketing approaches and sharing in the results;

And finally, the creation of a series of exhibitions, diverse in style, cohesive in theme, which would foster dialogue on the questions of public art among citizens and professionals alike.

The four exhibitions, separately, and as a collaborative event, though dissimilar in form and materials, pointed out the many visions and values of public art.

At Woodlawn Cemetery, the Bronx Council on the Arts, under the curatorship of Betti-Sue Hertz and Fred Wilson, installed an exhibition entitled "Houses of Spirits/Memories of Ancestors." Nine artists created pieces reflecting the iconic nature of the site with its implications of mortality and immortality. By reaching into the past, the artists recovered personal and historical memories in response to this contemplative site.

The streets of lower Manhattan became the site for REPOhistory's Sign Project. Under the aegis of the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council, the artists' collective REPOhistory positioned 39 historical markers throughout the tip of Manhattan. The markers did not celebrate the traditional events associated with that area, but rather the forgotten people, moments and places – the slave market, the first Chinatown, the paupers' jail – that do not fit easily into conventional versions of our history.

Socrates Sculpture Park, a riverfront site in Queens under the curatorship of Enrico Martignoni, became the venue for an exploration of where public art is heading. Five artists created pieces pointing to the future, to internationalism and a recombination of the many forms of large-scale public sculpture.

Staten Island's Snug Harbor Cultural Center mounted an exhibition entitled "Silhouettes of the Southwest." Under the curatorship of Olivia Georgia, seven artists looked at the myths and icons of the Southwest. They created new works which combined the clichés – adventurism, conquest and heroic existence bound to nature, animals and a rugged landscape – with contemporary realities.

The four exhibitions, in four boroughs of New York, responded to their unique sites with thoughtful, often witty pieces which shared ideas about history, exploration, legacies and the future with their own communities, as well as with those art lovers who ventured under rivers and over bridges to sample the other aspects of this project.

This catalogue, with its four separate parts, will serve as a document for this innovative and successful collaboration between four such distinct arts organizations from such different parts of the city.

The sponsoring organizations of "1992 ¿The Americas?" received generous support for this pilot project from the Cowles Charitable Trust, Philip Morris Companies Inc., the New York Community Trust and the Plumssock Fund.

THE LOWER

MANHATTAN

SIGN

PROJECT

REPO
HISTORY
REPOSSESSING HISTORY



June 27, 1992
- June 30, 1993

REPOhistory
339 Lafayette Street, #301
New York, NY 10012

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In the Spring of 1991, a newish artists' collaborative calling itself REPOhistory made a proposal to the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council. This artists' and writers' collaborative wanted to put signs—historical markers—up throughout lower Manhattan. The signs were to deal not with the grand history of merchants and generals and Indian chiefs, but with the vernacular history of the common, and the uncommon, inhabitants and activities of New York. REPOhistory needed a sponsor for this exhibition, and the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council wanted to do it.

Many meetings later, this important exhibition, sponsored by the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council, went up all over the street corners of lower Manhattan and stayed up for one year. "The Lower Manhattan Sign Project" amused, outraged and engaged all of us who live, work and play downtown. It is easy to see why from the material in this catalogue.

Jenny Dixon
Executive Director

Lower Manhattan Cultural Council
1 World Trade Center Suite 1717
New York, NY 10048
tel. 212 432 0900, fax 212 432 3646

*How do you know the past?
Whose history is remembered?
Do other stories go untold?
Is this an historic site?
Who makes use of this history?
Is history truth or desire?
Can memory be colonized?
What does this place mean to you?
What meanings do you bring to
this place?
Is history progress or power?*

REPOhistory is a collective of visual and media artists, writers, performers and educators of diverse backgrounds. Our name comes from the notion of "repossessing history." We work to reclaim the past and re-present it as a multilayered, living narrative that includes the untold stories of those who have been marginalized or disenfranchised because of their class, race, gender or sexuality.



Histories are written by specific individuals who represent a particular class, ethnic group, or political interest. REPOhistory seeks to question how history is constructed, to demystify the official versions, and insert the stories, peoples and events which have been omitted. Our intent is not to substitute "our version" for "their version" but to provoke critical and multiple readings.

Amid the signage jungle of lower Manhattan, the metal plaques attached high on lampposts might first be taken as standard warnings from officialdom. But the imagery seems unlikely — a falling body, the photo of an open grave, portraits of a homeless man and a radical politician, a floating ladder and noose. And the texts just don't have that bureaucratic thud. On closer scrutiny of the information offered, mutiny is apparent. The lively array of pictorial signs are, of course, art. But rather than "review" the products (most of which work really well in context), I want to explore the process of this exemplary public art project.

The goal was to repossess history. "Whose History is Remembered? Who Will We Forget?" is the fundamental question asked by REPOhistory, a multiethnic collective of artists, writers, and educators whose Sign Project opened with panache and a parade in lower Manhattan in June 1992. The two-sided, 18 x 24, three-color photo silkscreen historical markers, 39 of them in all, are clustered between Canal Street and the Battery, mostly south of City Hall Park. Although their projected life span is one year (through June 1993), some may last longer. It's kind of a miracle that they are there at all.

The project was conceived by alumni of PAD/D (Political Art Documentation/Distribution), the activist art group (and Archive, now at the Museum of Modern Art) that almost survived the 1980's, and other experienced activist artists. First called The History Project, it began as a study group and developed by the

fall of 1989 into a proposal (offered by REPOhistorian Greg Sholette) to "retrieve and relocate absent historical narratives at specific locations in the New York City area through counter-monuments, actions and events." Because many of the members were working already to counteract the official Columbus Quincentennial events, it was suggested at early meetings that the theme of colonialism/racism be adopted and the signs be scattered throughout Manhattan and Brooklyn, so that people could deal with their own neighborhoods and local education. One ambitious idea was to map the entire city and catalogue the historical sites in order to determine an overriding theme. Finally the group decided to focus for the time being on the lost history of lower Manhattan, where it all began, and where most events could be categorized as colonialism and racism.

Study of existing plaques, literature, walking tours, archives, guides began: we raised issues about fund raising, public art guidelines, and where our energy would best be spent — gaining access to The Media or constructing alternate media? (The Sign Project does both.) The original plan was to do the whole project as guerrilla art, but it eventually became clear that too much work was going to be invested for a hit-and-run strategy.

The minutes record that we talked about historical layers, "the juxtaposition of oral history and more or less immediate history and 'untold' histories that exist beyond personal memories, histories told by different living generations posed against a presentation

reaching much farther back." There were calls for a new historiography. We would emphasize "an understanding of history as something that is created and transmitted by the people," along the lines of Howard Zinn's *A People's History of the United States*.

In one early meeting we discussed different ways of looking at history; as monumental truth or palimpsest, a labyrinth of memory; as documented facts or as oral and written narratives by participants; as a linear progression or a chaos of catastrophes; as simulacrum of the past or as runaway simulations, parodies; as mass spectacles for the passive viewer or as participatory ritual; as inevitable and 'natural,' or as an open text allowing for magic realism; as traditional documentary or as questions about the role of the maker.

The sign form was decided on in May 1990. But it was still to be a long process. What seemed fairly simple — get a diverse bunch of artists together, pick sites and subjects, collectively discuss the projects, and put 'em up — took two more years. Readings in radical and imaginative history continued. The meetings were often lively history lessons as research began and people brought in possible sign subjects. Artists, writers, teachers joined and dropped out and others hung in and got serious and learned a lot about the historical enterprise as well as about working with other artists. (I'm still kicking myself that despite ongoing involvement with the group, I never got my sign together.) Sign prototypes were eventually shown at the Marxist School in June of 1991 and the next year was devoted to con-

struction, mapping and endless fund raising — from individuals in the progressive art community, solicited by mail, from a lot of grantwriting. There was a tremendous amount of bureaucratic and organizational work done by a hard-working core dedicated to the project's completion. The project finally cost about \$10,000. It would have been a great deal more without the endless free labor.

The opening was a gala occasion on a lovely Saturday afternoon at Castle Clinton, complete with a printed proclamation from Manhattan Borough President Ruth Messinger proclaiming June 27, 1992 "REPOhistory Day." A fullscale parade with papier mâché sculptures, a ship, tongues of flame ("Memories of Fire") stopped at each of ten nearby signs for content-specific storytelling/performances. (The liveliest was several African-American teenagers commemorating the June 1990 visit of Nelson Mandela to lower Manhattan.)

Popular history is an idea in the air, with its roots in community theater. From the art angle, Jenny Holzer has used signage as an art form since the late 1970s. In the 1980s, Edgar Heap of Birds adapted it to resurrect Native history, while Martin Wong did a series of New York street signs featuring cryptic messages in sign language, and REPOhistorian Ed Eisenberg's "Groundworks" project informed communities about their exact distances from a planned nuclear port in Staten Island. More recently, other artists, especially Scott Parsons in South Dakota (commemorating massacres of Native people) and Gloria Bornstein in Seattle (original uses of the

waterfront), have used the deadpan public announcement form to commemorate lost and disturbing histories.

From where I stand at the moment (admittedly obsessed with history as the road of good intentions to a hellish present, a result of my own years of Columbus-bashing), this kind of activism is preeminently satisfying. Too "didactic," "agit-prop," or "preachy" for some tastes, it nevertheless offers the solid ground that so much progressive art appears to long for. Rejecting the museum/gallery system is no longer a real option as it gets harder for any artist to survive the current economic depression. Most activist artists welcome the chance to exhibit their ideas while trying not to become too dependent on the system and continuing to seek out more encompassing, less compromising venues as well. The last decade has demonstrated that the latter is easier if one has acquired a modest reputation in the former. It has proved frustrating for those purists who have fully rejected (or been rejected by) even the mainstream fringes to see those who were willing to be politically eclectic in their exhibiting choices ("sellout" to some) get the grants and the invitations to do work in which others have much more experience.

Collective endeavors like REPOhistory — which has now evolved into a loose but ongoing group with several shows to their credit (including *Choice Histories*, the June 1993 installation at Artists Space on the history of abortion in the United States) and several upcoming projects — heal some of these

socially inflicted wounds. Some who worked on the Sign Project had shown a good deal more than others; many of the participating artists' names are recognized and respected within the "alternative" art world, if not exactly coffee-table commodities. While many did their signs alone, 14 were collaborative efforts, often cross-cultural and interdisciplinary.

REPOhistorian Lisa Maya Knauer observes that the signs took the current debates on history, multiculturalism, and school curriculums into the streets where everybody "can be confronted or provoked or challenged by the information." The audience consists of people living and working in the neighborhood, and the tourists that throng lower Manhattan. Understanding their movement and thought patterns, tying into their daily routines, was one of the challenges of the project. In mid-summer, the *New York Times* reported that Hilary Kliros's and Betty Beaumont's sign about how Maiden Lane got its name, which included the disembodied drawing of a hymen, had been found "disgusting" by a New Jersey secretary who felt it was "offensive to women" and had "caused a small furor in the neighborhood." My own haphazard interviewing around the signs indicated that while some people didn't even notice them at all, those who took the time got involved in what they saw and enjoyed it.

The signs do not take the place of books; reciprocal, cross-cultural histories are too complex for such brief texts. But with their image hooks and brief texts, they are subversive pic-

ture-bites that can evoke far more than they can cover. At the very least they can elicit a "Hey, I never learned *that* in school" response. They can suggest for a moment the bones, the middens, the villages, the farmhouses, the theaters, and the gallows lying beneath the pavement. Accessible, democratic, the signs are neither intrusive nor condescending. They can make people want to know more. The idea was not just to evoke history, but to provide a critical view, to disrupt the ingrained and conditioned perceptions of history and, finally, of who the audience thinks they are.

Altogether the Sign Project's form provides an incredibly open frame within which to pursue personal agendas/obsessions, and I offer it here as a model for any community, large or small. Progressive feminists have long maintained that social change begins with self transformation. History offers information about the self that leads outwards. (For example, in 1991 the families of eight African American school children filed a suit against New York City for failing to revise the public schools' curricula to reflect their cultural heritage.) The ways in which the political is personal are at the heart of this project. REPOhistorians and their audience find themselves understanding better their own lives and those of their families, their communities, and their places, within the context of other lost histories.

There is a chance the signs will be permanently maintained. In any case there are ways to keep this project moving. (The general print media has been good to the Sign Project,

while the art press has for the most part ignored it.) In an early meeting, children's history cards were suggested as an auxiliary; humorously disjunctive postcards and more general stickers questioning existing historical markers would also keep the spirit alive, as would video documentaries that students can watch and evaluate in relation to where they live and what they know. REPOhistory led walking tours, and these could be extended by an altered map of lower Manhattan to hand out to tourists. On a general level, other artists could remap their own towns, reframing and renaming what's already there. We can apply to art what Eduardo Galeano has said of literature: "Our effectiveness depends on our capacity to be audacious and astute, clear and appealing. I would hope that we can create a language more fearless and beautiful than that used by conformist writers to greet the twilight."

Lucy Lippard

(This essay is adapted from Lucy Lippard's December 1992 "Spider's Nest" column in *Z Magazine*.)

THE LOWER MANHATTAN SIGN PROJECT

JUNE 27, 1992
- JUNE 30, 1993



The Lower Manhattan Sign Project consists of 39 two-sided, silkscreened street signs, 18 by 24 inches, installed on lamp posts at 36 sites throughout lower Manhattan's financial district. The individual signs are linked by a two common elements that fill the lower portion of the back side of each sign: one or more of a series of questions addressed directly to the viewer concerning her or his relationship to the place, people and events recalled in the

sign; and a number corresponding to the sign's location on a map of the overall project. The map suggests the route for a walking tour running from Battery Park at the southern tip of Manhattan, north to Leonard Street, just above City Hall. Visits to these sites can also easily be broken into three lunch-hour walks taking in the clusters of signs around Battery Park, Wall Street and City Hall.

KEY

1. *Potter's Field/Ellis Island* - Jayne Pagnucco
2. *Indian Giver or When Will America Be Discovered?* - Todd Ayoun
3. *The Great Negro Plot of 1741* (3 signs) - Mark O'Brien & Willie Birch
4. *Leisler's Rebellion* - Stephen Duncombe
5. *Bullet Made from Statue of King George III* - Darin Wacs
6. *Homelessness: Forgotten Histories* - Tom Klem
7. *Whitehall Induction Center* - Betti-Sue Hertz
8. *Origin of Pearl Street* - Sabra Moore
9. *Nelson Mandela's Visit to New York City* - Curlee Holton
10. *Origin of the Word "Indian"* - Gustavo Silva
11. *Indian Settlement Sites* - Tchin
12. *India House* - Leela Ramotar
13. *The Other J. P. Morgan* - Greg Sholette
14. *Stock Market Crash* - Jim Costanzo
15. *False Democracy: Inequality of the U.S. Senate* - Ed Eisenberg
16. *Subway Fire* - Sam Binkley
17. *Who Owns Your Life?: Insurance and National Health Care* - Carin Kuoni
18. *The Meal and Slave Market* - Tess Timoney & Mark O'Brien
19. *Rose Schneiderman: Union Activist* - Nannette Yanuzzi Macias & Jeff Skoller
20. *The First Chinese Community in the United States* - EPOXY Art Group
21. *John Jacob Astor and Native Americans* - Alan Michelson
22. *The Story of the Waterfront* - Dan Wiley
23. *Madame Restell and Anthony Comstock* (2 signs) - Lisa Maya Knauer & Janet Koenig
24. *Office Workers Eat Their Lunch* - Neill Bogan & Irene Ledwith
25. *Maiden Lane: What's in a Name?* - Hilary Kliros & Betty Beaumont
26. *Gotham City* - Lise Prown & Curt Belshe
27. *Epidemics* - Brian Goldfarb
28. *Frances Wright: Racial and Sexual Equality* - Josely Carvalho & Deborah Mesa-Pelly
29. *Vito Marcantonio: The People's Congressman* - Gerald Mayer & Marina Gutierrez
30. *Civil Defense Drill Arrests in the 1950's* - Jody Wright
31. *Fight Tonight: Boxing and Exploitation* - George Spencer & Cynthia Anderson
32. *Forlorn Hope/Debtor's Jail* - Laurie Ourlicht & Jim Ciment
33. *The First Alms House* - Anita Morse & Andy Musilli
34. *Negros Burial Ground/The City Limits* - Dan Wiley & Lisa Maya Knauer
35. *Smith Act Trials* - Keith Christensen
36. *United Tailoresses Society* - Stephanie Basch

THE TOUR

1. POTTER'S
FIELD/ELLIS
ISLAND

Jayne Pagnucco

W SIDE OF WHITEHALL
BUILDING ON BATTERY
PLACE

2. INDIAN GIVER
OR WHEN WILL
AMERICA BE
DISCOVERED?

Todd Ayoung

S SIDE OF BATTERY
PLACE AT GREENWICH
STREET

3. THE GREAT
NEGRO PLOT OF
1741
(3 SIGNS)

Mark O'Brien &
Willie Birch

NE ENTRANCE TO
BATTERY PARK

4. LEISLER'S
REBELLION

Stephen Duncombe

W SIDE OF WHITEHALL
AT BEAVER STREET,
IN FRONT OF U.S.
CUSTOMS HOUSE

SUBJECT

In 1904, "Rose," an immigrant steerage-class woman, was unjustly detained and subsequently died at Ellis Island. This sign questions the classification of undesirable immigrants at Ellis Island and the methods used by the City to dispose of its disenfranchised.

IMAGE

Jacob Riis photograph of Potter's Field burial on Hart's Island (1889). Colors: black and white.

SUBJECT

This sign reinterprets the "sale" of Manhattan to the Dutch in 1626, contrasting European and Native American notions of land ownership, and linking this and other colonial "exchanges" to the ongoing controversy over gambling on the upstate Mohawk reservation.

IMAGE

Slot machine with text, "Spirits of America." Colors: black and red on white.

SUBJECT

In 1741, in the aftermath of a fire that destroyed nearby Fort George, 34 people, mostly black men, were executed for conspiring to overthrow ruling white society. These three signs retell the events of the "plot," the inquisition that followed, and explore the social conditions that, today as in 1741, allow for this type of racial witch hunt to occur.

IMAGE

Sign 1: 18th century map of Manhattan, with burning properties; Sign 2: expanded 18th century map with Colonial justice and executions; Sign 3: Map of late 20th century NYC with contemporary photos of racially charged situations. Colors: black and red on white.

SUBJECT

In 1689, the local militia of New York, led by Jacob Leisler, seized nearby Fort James, overthrew the colonial Governor and established a popular government that ruled the colony for two years. When Leisler was subsequently executed by the reinstated elite, no carpenter would furnish a ladder for the gallows.

IMAGE

Ladder and noose. Colors: black and red on white.

1



2



3



4

5. BULLET MADE
FROM STATUE OF
KING GEORGE
III

DARIN WACS

NW CORNER, BROADWAY
AND MORRIS STREET

SUBJECT

On July 9, 1776, the gilded equestrian statue of King George III that stood in nearby Bowling Green was torn down by supporters of independence. The remains of the statue were later molded into bullets for use in the Revolutionary War.

IMAGE

Front: Statue fragments and text; Back: Bullet mold, document and text. Colors: black and red on white.

6. HOMELESSNESS:
FORGOTTEN
HISTORIES

TOM KLEM

S SIDE OF STONE
STREET, JUST OFF
WHITEHALL

SUBJECT

Using the idiom of traditional historical markers, this sign recalls a group of three homeless people who spent the cold night of March 4, 1991 sleeping on this street. In elevated style, it describes their bravery, pride and independence in contending with both physical adversity and social invisibility.

IMAGE

All text, designed to mimic a brass plaque (in English and Spanish). Colors: black and gold.

7. WHITEHALL
INDUCTION
CENTER

BETI-SUE HERTZ

NW CORNER, WHITEHALL
AND PEARL STREETS

SUBJECT

Quotations from a popular song and story from the Vietnam era, and contemporary documentary passages recall the draft inductions and resulting anti-war protests at the Army Induction Center formerly located on this block.

IMAGE

Front: War protesters; Back: Napalm victims. Colors: black on purple.

8. ORIGIN OF
PEARL STREET

SABRA MOORE

S SIDE OF PEARL
STREET, JUST W OF
WHITEHALL

SUBJECT

Describes brief peaceful period of Dutch/Native American trade along what was, during the 1620s, the shell-lined bank of the East River. Uses symbolism of cultural attitudes towards shells to delineate difference, change, betrayal.

IMAGE

Text bisected by outline of Pearl Street, interspersed with cutouts of woman, shells, on both sides. Colors: red, blue, purple and black on white.

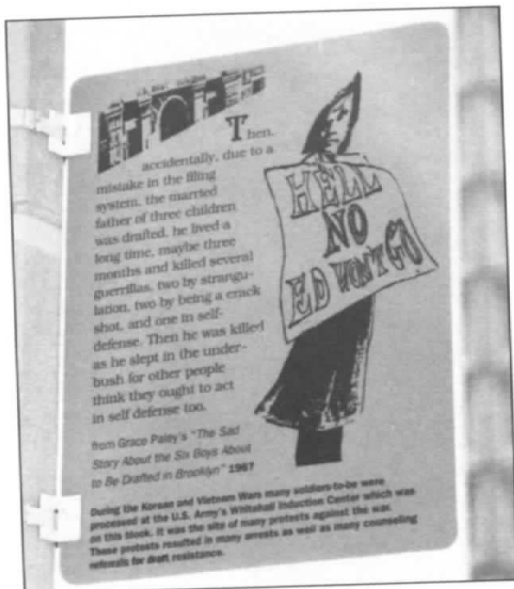
5



6



7



8



9. NELSON
MANDELA'S
VISIT TO NEW
YORK CITY

CURLEE HOLTON

SW CORNER OF STATE
AND PEARL STREETS

SUBJECT

Set at the foot of Broadway, where tickertape parades have traditionally assembled, this sign carries visual images and a poem by the artist recalling the triumphal parade that greeted Nelson Mandela during his June 1990 visit to the City.

IMAGE

Collage of drawings — Mandela's face, prison bars, spectators and buildings along parade route. Colors: black on white.

SUBJECT

10. ORIGIN OF THE
WORD "INDIAN"

GUSTAVO SILVA

N SIDE OF STATE
STREET, BELOW
WHITEHALL.

An excerpt from Columbus' log of his voyage, in which he describes the Arawaks as "gente viven endios," ("a people living under God"), suggests the possibility that the Spanish word for Indian ("indios") may derive from the phrase "under God" ("endios").

IMAGE

The word "ENDIOS" repeated four times, fading gradually into the word "INDIOS". Colors: yellow, red, purple and black on white.

SUBJECT

11. INDIAN
SETTLEMENT
SITES

Tchin

E SIDE OF WATER
STREET, BETWEEN
COENTIES SLIP AND OLD
SLIP

Recalls Manhattan before the Dutch exchanged it to the English in 1667 for the South American country of Surinam, after having only leased it from the Delaware Indians.

IMAGE

Line drawing of a 17th century Indian village. Colors: black on white.

SUBJECT

12. INDIA HOUSE

LEELA RAMOTAR

HANOVER SQUARE, NW
CORNER OF WILLIAM
STREET AND EXCHANGE
PLACE

India House, an early 20th century businessmen's club, still stands at the south end of Hanover Square. The club had no direct connection to the India trade, but derived its name from the same myth of the wealth of India that drove early European adventurers toward the new world.

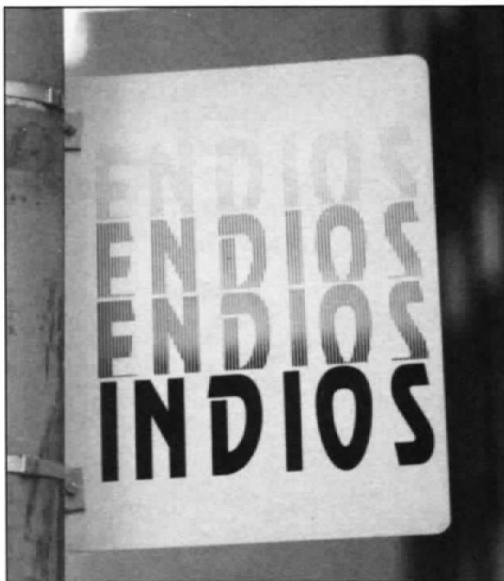
IMAGE

A map of the U.S. labeled "India," below question: "Where is the fabulous wealth of India, the spices, silks and gems which Columbus sought?" Colors: red and black on white.

9



10



11



12



13. THE OTHER
J. P. MORGAN

GREG SHOLETE

S SIDE OF EXCHANGE
PLACE BETWEEN NASSAU
AND WILLIAM STREET,
IN FRONT OF THE J.P.
MORGAN CORPORATE
HEADQUARTERS

SUBJECT

During the Civil War, men who could afford a \$300 fee hired substitutes to take their place in the Union army. While J.P. Morgan's "second" fought the Confederacy, Morgan became wealthy by speculating on the outcome of the war at the New York Gold Exchange, or "Gold Room," which was on the corner of William Street and Exchange Place in 1863.

IMAGE

A photo-recreation of an anonymous soldier standing in front of Edward Steichen's famous portrait of Morgan. Colors: brown, tan and white.

SUBJECT

14. STOCK MARKET
CRASH

JIM COSTANZO

W SIDE OF NASSAU
STREET BETWEEN WALL
STREET AND EXCHANGE
PLACE, IN FRONT OF
THE STOCK EXCHANGE

IMAGE

Ties unregulated financial markets to the cyclical depressions which occurred in the U.S. economy in the 1890's, 1920's, and the 1980's. Debunks the myth that stockbrokers jumped out of windows along Wall Street in the 1920's.

A stockbroker falling toward a crowd of onlookers, with the superimposed text, "Advantages of an Unregulated Economy." Colors: black on white.

SUBJECT

15. FALSE
DEMOCRACY:
INEQUALITY OF
THE U.S.
SENATE

Ed EISENBERG

N SIDE OF WALL
STREET, IN FRONT OF
FEDERAL HALL.

Describes the unequal structure of the U.S. Senate, which met on this site for the first time in 1789. Under this structure, to which the Constitution itself expressly forbids any amendment, large states have the same representation as small states, and therefore their populations are under-represented.

IMAGE

A set of scales weighing the population of New York State against that of seventeen smaller states combined. Colors: red, blue and black on white.

SUBJECT

16. SUBWAY FIRE

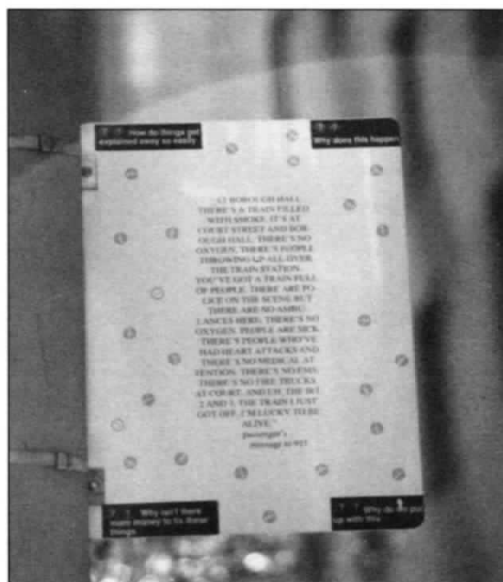
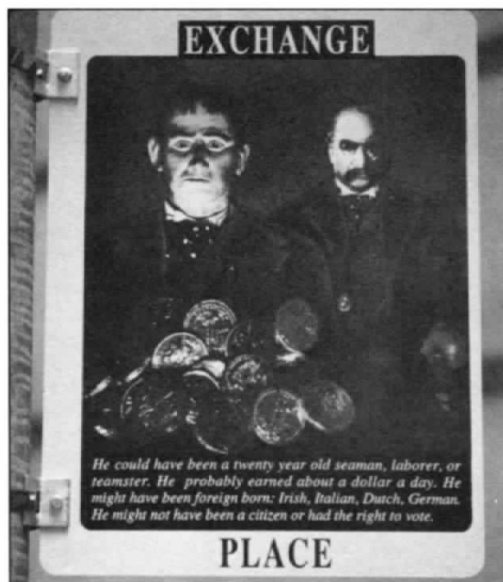
SAM Binkley

S SIDE OF WALL STREET
JUST W OF WILLIAM
STREET

Front: Description of the December 28, 1990 subway fire that broke out in the tunnel near Brooklyn's Clark Street Station, killing 2 passengers and injuring 188 others en route to nearby Wall Street Station. Back: The transcript of a "911" emergency call that was received during the fire.

IMAGE

Subway tokens and 22 clocks, combined with design elements used by the subway system. Colors: black on white.



17. WHO OWNS YOUR
LIFE?:
INSURANCE AND
NATIONAL
HEALTH CARE

CARIN KUONI

S SIDE OF WALL STREET
BETWEEN WILLIAM AND
HANOVER STREETS

SUBJECT

During the 19th century, the Nautilus Company (now New York Life Insurance Company) sold slave owners property insurance on slaves from its offices near this spot. Today, millions of Americans, in particular those living with AIDS, are unable to purchase affordable health insurance due to the lack of a national health care policy.

IMAGE

Front: a slave in an attitude of supplication; Back: a contemporary crowd. Colors: black and blue on white.

18. THE MEAL AND
SLAVE MARKET

**TESS TIMONEY &
MARK O'BRIEN**

NE CORNER OF WALL AND
WATER STREETS

SUBJECT

In 1746, nearly one in every five New Yorkers was black, and New York City was the country's second largest urban slave center. This sign marks the site of a Colonial slave market and recalls the vital role that enslaved Africans played in the City's social and economic growth from the early 1600's until the State abolished slavery in 1827.

IMAGE

A 17th century print depicting New Amsterdam, with detail enlarged to reveal the presence of African slaves. Colors: black on white.

19. ROSE
SCHNEIDERMAN:
UNION ACTIVIST

**NANNETTE YANUZZI
MACIAS & Jeff
Skoller**

NW CORNER OF WALL AND
SOUTH STREETS

SUBJECT

Recalls the life of Rose Schneiderman (1884-1972), prominent Jewish labor organizer and feminist. Includes an excerpt from an impromptu speech she made in 1934 to striking members of the laundry workers union, prior to embarking at the nearby Wall Street Pier.

IMAGE

Photo-collage with Rose Schneiderman giving speech. Colors: black and red on white.

20. THE FIRST
CHINESE
COMMUNITY IN
NYC

EPOXY Art Group

NE CORNER OF FRONT
STREET AND BURLING
SLIP

SUBJECT

A memorial to those Chinese traders and seamen who, in the 1830's, formed the first Chinese residential community in the United States in the area around what is now the South Street Seaport.

IMAGE

Tien Hou, the Queen of Heaven and Patron Saint of boat people in China, from whom early Chinese settlers in the United States took their blessings during their sea voyages. Colors: black and red on yellow.

WHO OWNS YOUR LIFE?

There was a time when people openly claimed to own other people. They would insure them against loss or theft.

In 1860, Philip Swann, an enslaved African-American, ran away from his owner, Fred Clarke of Powhatan, Virginia. Clarke was paid 500 dollars by the Nauticus Company for the "loss of property". In the late antebellum period, many slave masters began to insure their slaves' worth. The Nauticus Company was just one of several insurance companies—many of which were located in New York City—to serve this new market.

This is the site of the former headquarters of the Nauticus Company, one of the first insurance companies in the United States. Later it became the New York Life Insurance Company.



ROSE SCHNEIDERMAN (1884-1972): worker, union organizer, feminist, suffragist. Jewish; born in Poland, left school at 13.

In 1903, she helped organize Local 23 of the United Cloth Hat and Cap Makers of North America, and became the first woman elected to that union's general executive board. In 1904, Schneiderman joined the Women's Trade Union League (WTUL) and served as its President from 1926-47.

Schneiderman and the WTUL raised the consciousness of the male-dominated trade union movement about women's rights and needs. The WTUL organized women into trade unions and developed educational programs for empowering



21. JOHN JACOB
ASTOR AND
NATIVE
AMERICANS

Alan Michelson

N SIDE OF PINE
STREET, BETWEEN
WILLIAM AND PEARL
STREETS

SUBJECT
Marks the site of the one-time headquarters of John Jacob Astor's American Fur Company at 68 Pine Street with a series of problematic exchanges — commercial, ecological and spiritual — that have characterized the colonial relationship between Europeans and Native Americans.

IMAGE

Medallion bearing the likeness of Astor set in center of bands of text that evoke a Hudson Bay blanket design. Colors: blue, yellow, red, green and black on white.

SUBJECT

22. THE STORY OF
THE WATERFRONT

Dan Wiley

SW CORNER, WEST AND
LIBERTY STREETS

Historical analysis of the westward expansion of the Manhattan waterfront through landfills. The sign explores the relationship between business interests and the public interest in determining how land-use decisions were made during two historical periods: following the Great Fire of 1835 and in the development of Battery Park City from 1966 to the present.

IMAGE

Front: 19th century waterfront map with text superimposed; back: 20th century waterfront map with text superimposed. Colors: yellow, red and black on white.

23. MADAME RESTELL
AND ANTHONY
COMSTOCK
(2 SIGNS)

**Lisa Maya KNAUER
& JANET KOENIG**

N SIDE OF LIBERTY
STREET AT GREENWICH
STREET

SUBJECT

Restell, a well-known 19th century abortionist, had offices on this block. She was a target of anti-abortion crusader Anthony Comstock, who also helped establish legal censorship of sexually explicit materials, including abortion and birth control information, and homoerotic literature. The signs also recall the role that the American Medical Association played in the campaign to criminalize abortion during the 19th century.

IMAGE

Sign 1. Line drawing of Restell; AMA logo. Colors: brown on tan. Sign 2. Line drawing of Comstock. Colors: brown and red on tan.

24. OFFICE WORKERS
EAT THEIR
LUNCH

**Neill BOGAN &
IRENE LEDWITH**

S SIDE OF LIBERTY,
BETWEEN BROADWAY AND
TRINITY PLACE

SUBJECT

This sign, located at a popular outdoor lunch spot, describes the growing population of women office workers in the 19th century, and explores the significance of everyday events and items (like lunches and newspapers) to historians.

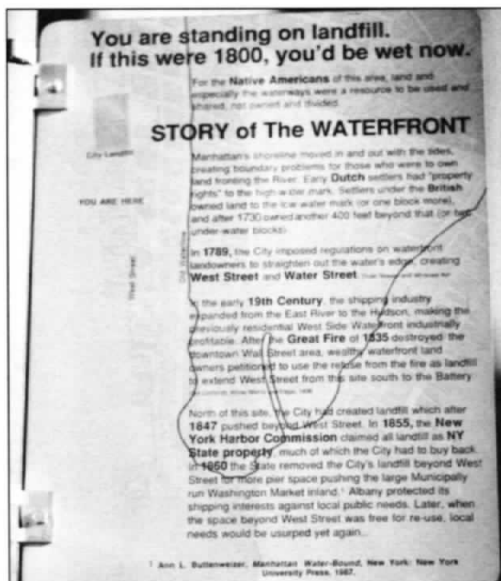
IMAGE

Front: Drawing of 19th century woman office worker; back: Photos and drawings of lunch bag, handbag and lunch boxes. Colors: black on white.

21



22



23



24



25. MAIDEN LANE:
WHAT'S IN A
NAME?

**Hilary Kliros &
Betty Beaumont**

S SIDE OF MAIDEN LANE,
BETWEEN NASSAU AND
WILLIAM STREETS, IN
FRONT OF THE FEDERAL
RESERVE BANK

SUBJECT

This sign deals with the historical and contemporary role of women workers in NYC. The front recalls the origins of Maiden Lane, and traces the place of women in its history. The back documents the continuing wage disparity between men and women workers, and the persistence of a "glass ceiling" preventing women from rising to the upper echelons of corporate America.

IMAGE

Front: Paper doll cut-out of young woman carrying laundry, and medical illustration of a hymen; Back: Woman walking up staircase and shattering "glass ceiling" with her briefcase. Colors: black, brown & pink on white (front); white, yellow, black, blue & red (back).

26. GOTHAM CITY

**Lise Prown &
Curt Belshe**

W SIDE OF WILLIAM
STREET, BETWEEN FULTON
AND JOHN STREETS

SUBJECT

Recalls the birthplace of the early 19th century author, Washington Irving, who gave New York the nickname "Gotham City" after a legendary English village whose inhabitants acted demented to avoid paying taxes.

IMAGE

Aerial photo of NYC with stylized words "Welcome to Gotham City." Colors: black and red on white.

27. EPIDEMICS

Brian Goldfarb

BECKMAN STREET BETWEEN
WILLIAM AND GOLD
STREETS

SUBJECT

In 1849, faced with a major cholera epidemic, the City turned public schools into hospitals rather than build or buy new facilities. This sign, located across from the Beekman Hospital, and just south of the former site of PS 1, links the City's response to that epidemic to its current response to the AIDS epidemic, in order to raise the question of whose interests are reflected in public health policies.

IMAGE

Rows of children at desks and rows of people lying in hospital beds. Colors: blue and black on white.

28. FRANCES WRIGHT:
RACIAL AND
SEXUAL EQUALITY

**Josely Carvalho &
Deborah Mesa-Pelly**

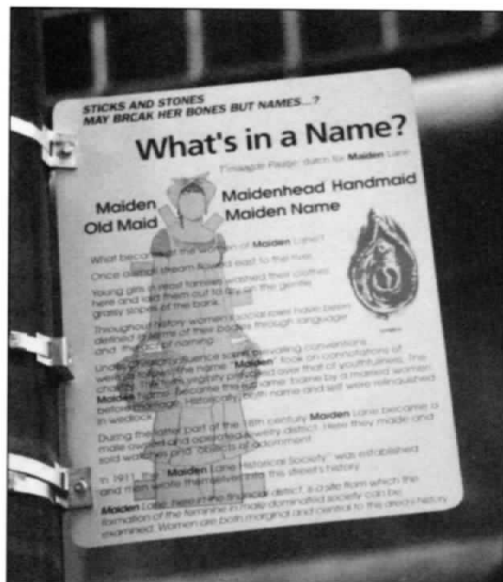
TRAFFIC ISLAND, PARK
ROW AT BARCLAY STREET

SUBJECT

The sign commemorates a site where Frances Wright, a prominent 19th century proponent of women's rights and opponent of slavery, delivered a public address in 1819. It gives a brief biography of Wright and includes excerpts from her speeches.

IMAGE

Drawing of Wright superimposed on drawing of a public lecture hall. Colors: black, white and yellow.



29. VITO

MARCANTONIO:
THE PEOPLE'S
CONGRESSMAN

GERALD MAYER &
MARINA GUTIERREZ

S SIDE OF BARCLAY
STREET, BETWEEN
BROADWAY AND CHURCH
STREET

SUBJECT

Vito Marcantonio, East Harlem Congressman for 14 years, died near this spot in 1954. The sign recalls this leader of the American Labor Party, who, as a champion of civil rights and Puerto Rican independence, and opponent of the Cold War and McCarthyism, created a powerful coalition of Italo-American, Puerto Rican and African American voters.

IMAGE

Drawing of Marcantonio and supporters carrying signs, Puerto Rican, Italian, African and American flags. Colors: green, white, red and black.

30. CIVIL DEFENSE
DRILL ARRESTS
IN THE 1950'S

Jody Wright

PARK ROW AT S TIP OF
CITY HALL PARK.

SUBJECT

Describes the arrests that resulted from acts of civil disobedience during air raid drills of the period. These acts were part of a growing protest movement against nuclear bomb testing and the militarization of American society.

IMAGE

Front: Protesters being loaded into a paddy wagon; back: fallout shelter emblem with skull. Colors: black, yellow and red on white.

31. FIGHT TONIGHT:
BOXING AND
EXPLOITATION

GEORGE SPENCER &
CYNTHIA ANDERSON

PARK ROW AT S TIP OF
CITY HALL PARK.

SUBJECT

Describes the rise of boxing as a popular sport in the 1840's, (particularly at The Arena, a public house formerly located near this spot), and the inherent contradictions of a sport in which the very poor struggle against one another to provide entertainment for audiences of the more affluent classes.

IMAGE

Two boxers squaring off. Colors: black and red on yellow.

32. FORLORN
HOPE/DEBTOR'S
JAIL

LAURIE OURLICHT &
JIM CIMENT

E SIDE OF PARK ROW AT
CHAMBERS STREET, OUT-
SIDE THE MUNICIPAL
BUILDING

SUBJECT

For a period during the 18th century inmates of the Debtors' Prison located near this spot published their own newspaper, *The Forlorn Hope*, in which they protested their imprisonment and compared their state to that of slaves. Most of the inmates were the very poor; the majority owed less than \$25. Imprisonment for debt was finally banned in New York State in 1831, four years after the state abolished slavery.

IMAGE

The paper's masthead, which depicted a slave side by side with a prisoner in shackles. Colors: black on white.

SUBJECT

33. THE FIRST ALMS
HOUSE

**Anita Morse &
Andy Musilli**

S SIDE OF CHAMBERS
STREET, NEAR ELK
STREET, IN FRONT OF
THE TWEED COURTHOUSE

Connects the existence of the 18th century Alms House located near this spot with the current crisis of homelessness. Memorializes the life and death of June, a homeless New Yorker who died on February 2, 1992.

IMAGE

Front: Photograph of June; Back: the Alms House. Colors: black and red on white.

SUBJECT

34. NEGROS BURIAL
GROUND/THE
CITY LIMITS

**DAN Wiley & Lisa
Maya KNAUER:**

READE STREET BETWEEN
BROADWAY AND ELK
STREETS

Describes the 18th and 19th century practice of burying African Americans, and others denied burial in city churchyards, in a common field located just outside the city limits. 20,000 people may be buried at this site.

IMAGE

Front: a cross section of the ground showing layers of earth covering burials; Back: an 18th century map. Colors: red, black and tan on white.

SUBJECT

35. SMITH ACT
TRIALS

Keith Christensen

FOLEY SQUARE, IN
FRONT OF THE UNITED
STATES COURTHOUSE.

Describes the conspiracy trials of eleven members of the Communist Party, held here in 1949. The defendants, who were convicted of advocating the overthrow of the government by force, were amongst the first victims of the American Inquisition, commonly referred to as The McCarthy Era.

IMAGE

A justice with a net and flag presiding over a bound defendant wearing a devil mask. Colors: black, red and yellow.

SUBJECT

36. UNITED
TAILORRESSES
SOCIETY

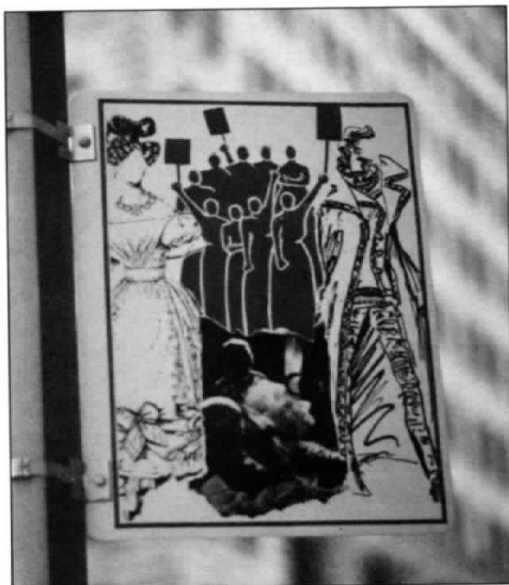
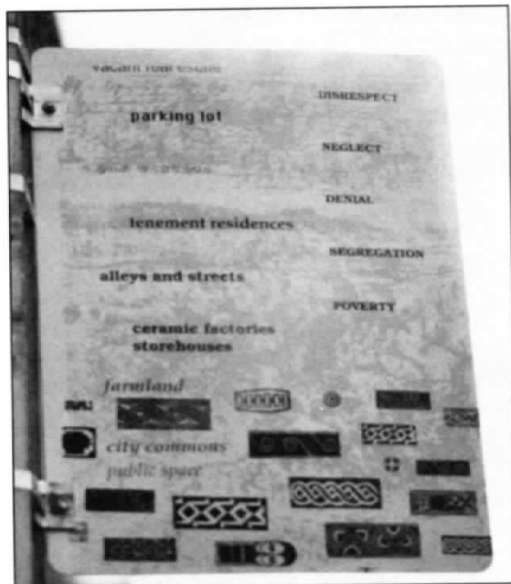
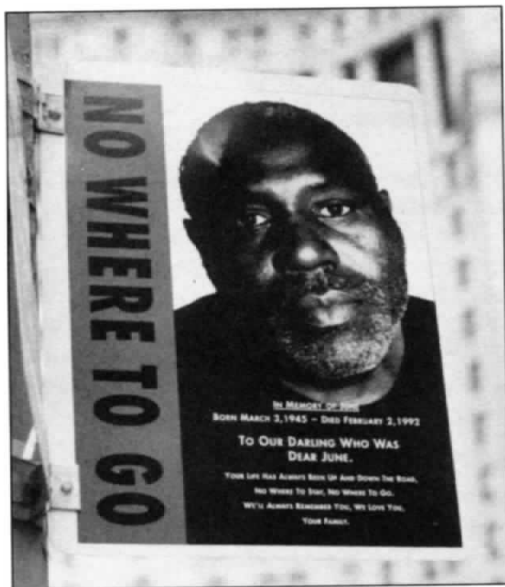
Stephanie Basch

W SIDE OF CHURCH
STREET BETWEEN
LEONARD AND FRANKLIN
STREETS

The first all-women's strike in the United States occurred in lower Manhattan, and was organized in offices near this site. The sign also describes the current use, by the textile industry, of non-union shops overseas and in the United States.

IMAGE

An overlay of protesting workers, fashion illustrations and workers on a shop floor. Colors: black and red on white.



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 New-York City Municipal Reference & Research Center
 New York Historical Society
 New York Public Library
 Mid-Manhattan Library Picture Collection
 The Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture
 War Resisters League Archives

Sign Artists

Cynthia Anderson, Todd Ayoung, Stephanie Basch, Betty Beaumont, Curt Belshe, Sam Binkley, Willie Birch, Neill Bogan, Josely Carvalho, Keith Christensen, Jim Ciment, Jim Costanzo, Stephen Duncombe, Ed Eisenberg, EPOXY, Brian Goldfarb, Marina Gutierrez, Betti-Sue Hertz, Curlee Holton, Tom Klem, Hilary Kliros, Lisa Maya Knauer, Janet Koenig, Carin Kuoni, Irene Ledwith, Nanette Yannuzzi Macias, Deborah Mesa-Pelly, Gerald Meyer, Alan Michelson, Sabra Moore, Anita Morse, Andy Musilli, Mark O'Brien, Laurie Ourlicht, Jayne Pagnucco, Lise Prown, Leela Ramotar, Greg Sholette, Gustavo Silva, Jeff Skoller, George Spencer, Tess Timoney, Tchin, Darin Wacs, Dan Wiley, Jody Wright.

Opening Parade

Performers: Neill Bogan, Yekk Muzik, Mark O'Brien, Mia Tuttavilla, Theater in a New Key (THINK). Musicians: Claire Daly, Henry Hample, Will Holshouser, Bob Morris. Images: Todd Ayoung, Stephanie Basch, Lisa Blackshear, Neill Bogan, Jim Costanzo, Claire Eder, Michael Eder, Ed Eisenberg, Tom Klem, Carin Kuoni, Mark O'Brien, Megan Pugh, Leela Ramotar, Dan Wiley. Parade Marshal: Michael Eder.

Catalogue

Mark O'Brien, Neill Bogan, Stephen Duncombe, Lisa Maya Knauer, Carin Kuoni, Lise Prown, Dan Wiley. Photographs: Jim Costanzo, Betti-Sue Hertz, Tom Klem, Jayne Pagnucco

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Stephanie Basch
Betty Beaumont
Curt Belshe
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