



June 15, 2011

[Hill's Book of Negroes causes stir in Netherlands](#)

By CBC News

CBC News

<http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/story/2011/06/15/toronto-book-negroes.html>

*A Dutch group is threatening to burn Lawrence Hill's award-winning novel *The Book of Negroes*, because they oppose the use of the word negro in the title.*

A Dutch group is threatening to burn Lawrence Hill's award-winning novel *The Book of Negroes*, because they oppose the use of the word "negro" in the title.

The Canadian writer's novel, which traces the life of a slave girl, was recently published in the Netherlands, where a group that represents slavery victims has threatened to burn the book if its title isn't changed.

This week, Hill received a letter from Roy Groenberg, the leader of Dutch group Foundation Honor and Restore Victims of Slavery in Suriname.

"We, descendants of enslaved in the former Dutch colony Suriname, want let you know that we do not accept a book with the title *The Book of Negroes*," he said in the letter.

"We struggle for a long time to let the word 'nigger' disappear from Dutch language and now you set up your Book of Negroes! A real shame!"

Groenberg's group plans to burn the book on June 22 just over a week before July 1 - which marks the abolition of slavery in the Netherlands.

But Hill said that the title has given him the chance to explain this piece of history, which he said is "fascinating, important and troubling, to many thousands of readers in Canada, the UK, The Netherlands and elsewhere."

"I have found that when given the opportunity to see what I am doing in this book and with this title, readers understand that the title is not intended to be offensive, but that it is used historically, to shed light on a forgotten document and on a forgotten migration (that of thousands of Blacks from the USA to Canada in 1783)," he said in a letter to Groenberg.

The award-winning book has raised controversy before. Publishers in the United States and Australia called the book *Someone Knows My Name*. While in Quebec the book is titled *Aminata*.

But Hill says context is needed. In this case, *The Book of Negroes* isn't just the title, it refers to an actual historical document: a British naval ledger charting the migration of 3,000 African slaves from New York, to Nova Scotia and then to Africa.

Copies of the actual Book of Negroes are available in places such as the National Archives of Canada, Great Britain, and the New York City Public Library.

"The title is used not to provoke or offend but to resurrect a forgotten history," said Hill. "Really it affects the very people Mr. Groenberg purports to represent."

Jane Pyper, the city librarian at the Toronto Public Library, said *The Book of Negroes* is one of the library system's most popular books.

"It tells a story about our history that many people don't know and the fact it's circulated so many times at this library and across Canada is a testament to the fact that people want to know that story," she said.