

SCHOMBURG CENTER

For Research in Black Culture
The New York Public Library

SELF GUIDED TOUR



Start Here

Welcome



SchomburgCenter

Welcome to the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, recognized as one of the leading institutions of its kind in the world.

For over 85 years the Center, a research unit of the New York Public Library, has collected, preserved, and provided access to materials documenting the global black experience, and promoted the study and interpretation of the history and culture of peoples of African descent. Its collections have grown to more than 10 million items.

Because it has exhibitions, some people mistake the Schomburg Center for a museum. However, it is a research library. In a circulating library, one can borrow materials for a specified time period and then return them so that others can do the same.

A research library is, by definition, a place where one goes to investigate, study examine, and collect information on a particular topic. Books and objects cannot be borrowed, but are sometimes put on display in exhibitions.

A BRIEF HISTORY

The Division of Negro Literature, History, and Prints, forerunner to today's Schomburg Center opened as a special collection in the 135th Street Branch Library in 1925 to meet the needs of a changing community. Harlem was becoming the "Black Capital", and the Harlem Renaissance was underway.

In 1926, the division gained international acclaim with the acquisition of Arturo Schomburg's personal collection, which included more than 5,000 books, 3,000 manuscripts, 2,000 etchings and paintings and several thousand pamphlets. In 1940, the Negro Division was named in his honor.

In 1972, the Schomburg Collection was designated as a research library. The expansion of the Center in 1991 created spaces for the 340-seat Langston Hughes Auditorium in which concerts; forums, lectures, performances and other interpretive programs take place; exhibition galleries and the renovated American Negro Theatre.

TOUR

Now start your tour and please remember that, as with any special exhibition, objects on display should not be handled. Explore with your mind and eyes!



THE SCHOMBURG LOBBY

ARTURO ALFONSO SCHOMBURG (1874 – 1938)

Arturo A. Schomburg, a Puerto Rican of African descent was a bibliophile and collector of objects pertaining to African diasporan history and culture. From a young age, Schomburg was interested in discovering, studying and reclaiming his African heritage. He had been told, "Black people had no history, no heroes and no great moments." Therefore, he began to systematically collect the evidence of this rich and exciting history. First he concentrated on Puerto Rico and the Caribbean, and then expanded his scope of interest to include all of African world history. In 1932, he became curator of the Division of Negro History, Literature, and Prints. He held this position until his death in 1938. His legacy has continued and thousands of scholars, researchers and students from all over the world visit the Center each year.



THE LATIMER/ EDISON GALLERY

The Gallery hosts exhibitions year round. It was named for African-American scientist and inventor, Lewis Howard Latimer (1848-1927) and inventor, Thomas A. Edison. Latimer was the son of enslaved parents who actively sought their freedom. He is one of the men who helped to create the electric power industry. He worked with Alexander Graham Bell and others on some of the inventions that revolutionized the technology.

From the gallery, you can take a glimpse of the main reading room below; and admire the 4 murals, Aspects of Negro Life (1934) painted by famous Harlem Renaissance artist Aaron Douglas (1899-1979.)

LANGSTON HUGHES LOBBY



James Mercer Langston Hughes (1902 –1967) was born in Joplin, Missouri. He came to New York in 1921 where he studied at Columbia University. His poem, The Negro Speaks of Rivers was published in Crisis magazine when he was just 19. One of the writers of the Harlem Renaissance, he won Opportunity magazine's first literary prize in 1926 with his poem, The Weary Blues. A playwright, poet, novelist, librettist, and humorist, Hughes went on to become known as Harlem's Poet Laureate.

RIVERS by Houston Conwill

Rivers is a site-specific public art installation, dance floor, and peace memorial in honor of Langston Hughes and Arturo A. Schomburg. The cosmogram is inspired by Hughes's brilliant poem, *The Negro Speaks of Rivers*. Seven edited fragments of the poem are positioned symbolically at relevant geographic locations on the cosmogram. The final words of the poem, "My soul has grown deep like the rivers," are embedded in the body of a fish shape at the center of the circle. The poet's cremated remains are interred in a stainless steel book-like vessel beneath this emblem. The terrazzo floor is marked by a brass cosmogram bearing songlines, texts and literary signs paying ancestral tribute in the tradition of African ritual ground markings, weaving a web of connections between people of diverse cultures and backgrounds, the past and the present.

Two significant components of the cosmogram – the life lines- are drawn homage to ancestors Schomburg and Hughes. The lines symbolically pass through the places of their births – Puerto Rico, whose geographic location determines the outer circle of the cosmogram, and Joplin, Missouri – intersecting at the crossroads in Harlem where they lived, achieved and died.



The Negro Speaks of Rivers

I've Known Rivers:

I've Known Rivers Ancient as the World
And Older than the Flow of Human Blood
through Human Veins

My Soul has Grown Deep like the Rivers

I Bathed in the Euphrates
when Dawns were Young
I Built my Hut Near the Congo
and it Lulled Me to Sleep
I Looked Upon the Nile and
Raised the Pyramids Above It

I Heard the Singing of the Mississippi
When Abe Lincoln Went Down to New Orleans
And I've Seen its Muddy Bosom
Turn All Golden in the Sunset

I've Known Rivers:
Ancient Dusky Rivers

My Soul has Grown Deep like the Rivers

My Soul
has
Grown
Deep
like the
Rivers

COURTYARD

DREAMING OF HER OWN CHILD
By Tapfuma Gutsa, 1988

Looking out of the atrium windows in the Langston Hughes Lobby, one can see the courtyard and one side of the Landmark Building. There is also a sculpture to the left outside of the reading room on court level. This piece is a Shona sculpture by Zimbabwean artist Tapfuma Gutsa. The sculpture is on exhibit from the collection of Julie Belafonte.

NOW PROCEED UP THE STEPS AND TURN TO THE LEFT

LANDMARK BUILDING

You are in the Landmark Building, the site of the original 135th Street Branch Library that first housed Schomburg's famous collection.

The Exhibition Hall offers exhibitions year round

The Schomburg Shop

Don't miss the Shop! You will find exciting books for adults, teenagers and children, music, posters, postcards, and unique artifacts and jewelry from around Africa and the African Diaspora. Every purchase supports the important work of the Center.

The American Negro Theater on the basement level is where such notable actors as Sidney Poitier, Ruby Dee and Harry Belafonte performed. This room is now a multi-purpose space used for exhibitions, staged theatrical readings, workshops, film screenings and meetings.

COLLECTIONS

You have just completed your tour of the Schomburg Center. However, there is so much more to do and see here. Hopefully, the exhibitions have aroused your curiosity. What better place to find the answers to your questions than here? If you are interested in learning more about the global black experience, visit our five divisions:

The Jean Blackwell Hutson General Research and Reference Division

Holds and provides access to books, serials and microforms containing information by and about people of African descent throughout the world, concentrating on the humanities, social sciences, and the arts. From there you can make appointments to visit our 4 other divisions.

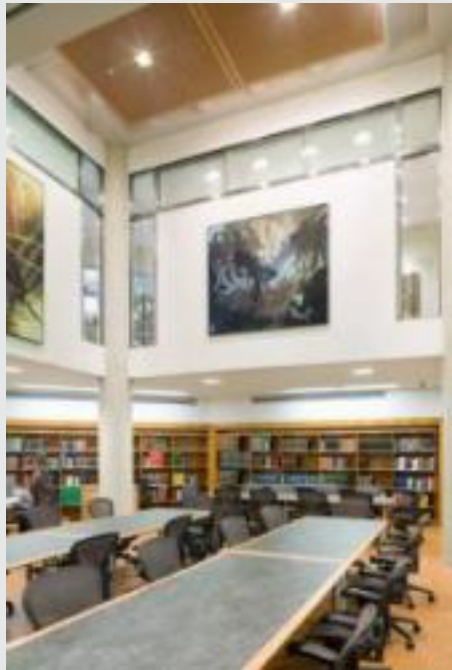
The Manuscripts, Archives, and Rare Books Division

Collects, preserves and makes available for research purposes rare, unique primary materials which document the history and culture of peoples of African descent throughout the world.

The Photographs and Prints Division

Contains over 300,000 images, both documentary and fine art photographs which document the history and culture of peoples of African descent worldwide, as well as the work of photographers of African descent.

COLLECTIONS



The Art and Artifacts Division

Collects, documents, preserves and interprets art and artifacts by and about peoples of African heritage throughout the world. This department contains over 20,000 items including painting, sculptures, posters, textiles, and other works.

The Moving Image and Recorded Sound Division

Offers black culture documented through audiovisual technology, which includes motion picture films, music, and video recordings.

Before you leave, make sure to **obtain a membership form and join the Schomburg Society**. You will receive information on upcoming exhibitions and the exciting programs and events at the Center, as well as discounts in the Shop.

And don't stop there! **Become a volunteer at the Schomburg Center** and help continue the Schomburg Center tradition of celebrating and supporting the study and dissemination of black history and culture.

Check out:
Digital Schomburg

Visit: www.schomburgcenter.org



<http://www.nypl.org/locations/tid/64/node/65914>

The Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture

The New York Public Library
515 Malcolm X Boulevard at 135th Street
New York, NY 10037.

DIRECTIONS

BY TRAIN: #2 or #3 to 135th Street;
C or E to 135th St. and St. Nicholas
(walk east to Lenox Ave.)

BY BUS: M7 or M102 to 135th Street
and Lenox Avenue

End of Tour
Come Again