The Black Freedom Struggle Has a New Name

By Dr. Khalil Gibran Muhammad, Director of the Schomburg Center

The events of the past few months, now simply referred to as Ferguson, have sparked nationwide protests on a scale not seen in a half century. From billboards to T-shirts, protest banners and news headlines—all emblazoned with the words “BlackLivesMatter” to #blacklivesmatter—to Twitter. Stay following. And this time “the revolution will be live” on change is in the cities as well as in the suburbs. Democratic, transparent, and inclusive. This is the new image, although this time it is far more youth-led activism of 50 years ago. Young people are shaping a movement in their own image, although this time it is far more democratic, transparent, and inclusive. This time the racial justice movement is about human rights and civil rights. This time change is in the cities as well as in the suburbs. And this time the revolution will be live on Twitter. Stay following.

The Black Freedom Struggle was given way to #BlackLivesMatter. The devolution of a movement for resources and recognition to a fight to exist, free of state-sanctioned violence. It categorically refuses to trade on respectability, to determine who deserves to die prematurely when the “authors of destruction,” as James Baldwin once said, control the apparatus of justice. Black people cannot establish different standards of justice, from policing to prison, outside of white decision makers and a predominantly white electorate. When former New York City mayor Rudy Giuliani claimed that crime was black people’s problem for us to fix on our own, he was making a 21st-century segregationist claim. Unlike popular myth, his Italian-American forebears did not save themselves from their own white-on-white crime. Welfare policies, machine politicians, union jobs, and white philanthropists added them over more of the 20th century. These reforms were pro-social, life-affirming, neoliberal interventions, amounting to a repudiation of criminal justice as the blunt instrument of social order. The lie of segregation has always been that blacks are unfit for or undeserving of equality, that they are monstrous and childlike, not fully human. #BlackLivesMatter defies this logic. It is also important to note how the geographic birthplace of African Americans with the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 now marks the prologue to a new human rights drama.

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The Black Freedom Struggle

As the Schomburg approaches its 50th anniversary, we’ve presented a photo retrospective that follows our journey from the 1920s to today.

FIRST ROW
Interior view of the reading room of the 1930 Schomburg Collection of Negro History and Literature (Schomburg Center) showing researchers at work in the collection. Photographer: Warner, N.Y.C.
A group of children gather around a statue of actor Ira Aldridge with Catherine Latimer, the first African American librarian hired by the New York Public Library, ca. 1930
Woman using Microfiche New Negro Press, ca. 1950
Langston Hughes sharing his book report with youth, ca. 1950

SECOND ROW
Left: Danny Barker, famous New Orleans musician (trompette et guitar), ca. 1951
Bobby Ward and (left), Stanton Biddle (rd trout), and Michael D. Stoll (1.trout), (for 84), at a benefit for the film “Watermelon Man,” ca. 1970
“Save the Schomburg Library” Protesters, ca. 1977
Harry Belafonte and former New York governor Mario Cuomo in “The Last Shall Be First” reception for Martin Luther King Jr., ca. 1986

THIRD ROW
Ottowarus Ogua We, 1415 of the Atlantic people in Ghana, gathered with a waka in 1991 and at the Schomburg Center, ca. 1914
Sidney Poitier and Gordon Parks at the Schomburg, ca. 1940
Vernon Jordan and James Baldwin, ca. 1956
Former Schomburg director Howard Dodson at a reception for playwrights Dale Seton, ca. 1977
Photographer: Carl Giolomo

FOURTH ROW
Bill Cosby with founder and president of the National Council of Negro Women, Coretta Scott King, ca. 1968
Mara Gaye, Founder’s Day, ca. 1990
Harry Belafonte (2nd left), Stanton Biddle (3rd right), Bobbi Yancy (2nd left), and Leon Bibb at a benefit for the opening reception for “Lady Legends in Jazz,” ca. 1988

Left to right: Elizabeth O’Nion, Houston, Virginia Sloane, Hampton, ca. 1958
All photos are courtesy of the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture / Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library

Unveiling the History of New York’s HOUSE BALL SCENE
House Ball competitor Aisha Diori, Manager of Special Events and Space Rentals and guest moderator for the Schomburg’s “In the Life” series, our collection that preserves LGBTQ materials, shares the empowering history of one of New York’s most powerful pages.

The glamorous House Ball scene has a rich history tied to Harlem, which lends to its dynamic cultural impact. Dating back to the 1920s and 1930s, the famous drag balls were initially organized by white gay men and featured both black and white patrons from diverse backgrounds. The eclectic makeup of these early drag balls reflected the business of the Harlem Renaissance. African Americans were welcomed by white investors for patronage, while white spectators flocked to “hip” Harlem spaces, regarding them as trend-setting and “exotic negro” events. Eventually the lavish balls became a space where newly migrated African Americans from the south and “liberal” northern whites could imagine themselves as mavericks, radicals pushing the norms of a then-segregated U.S. culture.

But in later years the early drag balls were plagued by an imbalance of racial power. Black performers were rarely crowned winners, and they often felt restricted in their ability to fully participate in the scene. Soon, the black queens looked for opportunities to create a cultural world that was truly their own. Which brings us to an exclusively black drag ball circuit that formed in New York City around the 1960s. However, the cultural and political landscape of Harlem, and the neighborhood’s earlier racial acceptance of drag culture, had drastically changed. Due to the growing popularity of 1960s black nationalist rhetoric (with its restrictions on how “real” black men should express themselves), the balls became a more dangerous pastime. They began to be held at an earlier date as a — tradition that continued to this day—in order to make it safer for participants to travel to the streets of Harlem with high heels and feathers. But even with its complex history, the House Ball scene remains one of the most positive, self-affirming cultures in New York City and beyond. One cannot merely describe it in all its glory. Its magic—and trend-setting influence—is best experienced live.

From the right: The Luv N Rags and Michelle Potter, Akeema-Zane & Schomburg Center House Ball. Photograph: Jeremiah Ben

Akeema-Zane, our Hip-Hop History Curriculum Researcher, describes the underexplored relationship between calypso and rap music.

Perhaps it was while listening to Lord Pretender and Brother Resistance’s song “Never Ever Worry” that the relationship between calypso and rap music became clear to me. A network of connections, of one hip-hop five elements, the relationship between calypso and rap music was forged. Rap music is often touted as having its roots most closely linked to the Trinidad music that Potter refers to as calypso, defined as “a folk song derived from the various forms of West African songs which may be intended as a folk song or merely as a form of rhythmic expression.”

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What inspired you to choose the items for this exhibition?
Tammi Lawson: I wanted our patrons to feel like they were discovering a work of art or an artist for the first time.
Maira Liriano: What inspired me to showcase children’s books was Walter Dean Myers’s piece, “Where Are the People of Color in Children’s Books?” He wrote about the value of recognizing ourselves in stories, especially stories written for children.

Steven Fullwood: I wanted to spotlight a sampling of letters written by black gays and lesbians not only because their work inspires me as a writer, but as a curator I recognize the necessity in helping to archive this largely underrepresented culture.

How is this exhibition in response to the popular social media movement, #BlackLivesMatter?
TL: Art allows us to see our culture in new ways, imagine other possibilities, and reflect on our values and humanity.
SF: It speaks to the necessity of consuming healthy, life-sustaining culture in order to have a context for the ongoing barrage of human rights abuses that people of African descent endure today in supposedly post-racial America.

Shola Lynch: It is a reminder that black people are not just victims but have, and always had, a voice.

Mary Yearwood: It not only speaks to issues of social justice, but illustrates hope, aspiration and empowerment as well as joy, laughter, celebration, and the everyday acts of living.

What does Black Life Matters mean to you?
SF: While it affirms black people, ultimately their audience is the larger, white power structure, which I think is problematic. Black lives, like all lives, matter. However, the structure, which I think is problematic. Black its audience is the larger, white power
SF: To you?

Steven Fullwood: I was struck by how many authors and illustrators were related to each other: Fathers and sons, husbands and wives, collaborating and passing the torch on to their children.

SF: That the Schomburg is a goldmine for black LGBTQ research. Black LGBTQ collections are rare, and even more rarely do those collections include actual letters written by black LGBTQ people.

TL: I was struck by how many authors and illustrators were related to each other: Fathers and sons, husbands and wives, collaborating and passing the torch on to their children.

MF: It means that black life is precious, important, and relevant.

What were you most surprised to discover in your research for this exhibition?
TL: That I have so many wonderful items from this exhibition?
SF: Their children.

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Comic Book Worlds Collide

O n January 17, the Schomburg Center’s Junior Scholars Program, in collaboration with Jerry Craft (Manusl Boyz) and John Jennings (Black Comix), welcomed over 2,300 scholars, families, youths, and other community members to our 3rd Annual Black Comic Book Festival. The free daylong event, which has become a highly anticipated celebration that brings together black nerd cultures from across the nation, gave comic book enthusiasts the opportunity to meet and hear from accomplished illustrators, comic book writers, and independent publishers.

“It is vitally important for young people to see images of people of color in all media. The imagination-expanding power of comics knows no boundaries as its narratives travel through history to the present day, and blasts into an astro-black future. The spark here is that readers and creators of color meet face to face, and that strengthens an astro-black future,” said Deirdre Hollman, Director of Education and Community Programs. “The power of comics knows no boundaries as its narratives travel through history to the present day, and blasts into an astro-black future. The spark here is that readers and creators of color meet face to face, and that strengthens an astro-black future.”

The free daylong event, which has become a highly anticipated celebration that brings together black nerd cultures from across the nation, gave comic book enthusiasts the opportunity to meet and hear from accomplished illustrators, comic book writers, and independent publishers. The event featured a range of activities, including panel discussions, Q&A sessions, and a variety of exhibits.

For the first time in the festival’s history, thousands of people from around the country participated in the event, which featured over 100 exhibitors showcasing their work. The festival featured a range of activities, including panel discussions, Q&A sessions, and a variety of exhibits.
New **Schomburg Pride Merchandise** Is Now On Sale!

**By Farrah Lopez, Communications Pre-Professional**

Visit the Schomburg Gift Shop and purchase our brand tote bag for only $20 and fill it with our newest books, including *Selected Letters of Langston Hughes*, as well as our other brand merchandise like pencils for just 75 cents each!

The Gift Shop now also carries posters of Martin Luther King Jr., Louis Armstrong, Billie Holiday, Rosa Parks, Harlem Jazz, and more!

And try sipping a cup of iced coffee out of one of our custom 10 oz mugs for only $10 (includes a spoon) or a 16 oz mug for only $12!

Remember: every purchase supports the Schomburg and members receive 20% off regular price items. Contact The Gift Shop at (212) 491-2206 for more information. Don’t miss out on these great deals and bring the Schomburg home with you!

The Schomburg Center Wins a Major Award!

**by Candice Frederick, Communications Manager**

We are excited to announce that the Schomburg Center has received the National Medal for Museum and Library Service, which is the nation’s highest honor given to museums and libraries, in recognition of service to the community and for making a difference in the lives of individuals, families, and communities.

We are grateful for your support and look forward to sharing this honor with you!

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The following calendar listings are highlights from our full program public schedule. For the most complete and up-to-date program information, please visit schomburgcenter.org/calendar.

**PUBLIC PROGRAMS**

**MAY**

Sunday, May 3 at 3:00PM
**First Fridays at the Schomburg**
Join us for our popular monthly social gathering, where there'll be live music, signature drinks, and extended viewing hours in our galleries!
Friday, May 1 at 6:00PM
First Fridays: Harlem Go Meet-Up
Presents "Harlem Mecca Edition"
Friday, May 4 at 6:30PM
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Friday, May 4 at 6:30PM
First Fridays: Harlem Go Meet-Up
Presents "Harlem Mecca Edition"
Friday, May 7 at 6:00PM
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**JUNE**

Monday, June 1 at 7:00PM
**The Literary Society**
The Literary Society makes you to join them for their book club conversation on Toni Morrison's new release, God Help the Child

**JUNE**

Tuesday, May 12 at 6:30PM
Between the Lines: Peter Slevin
Michelle Obama: A Life/Ingrid Peter Slevin is the first comprehensive account of the life and times of Michelle Obama, a woman of achievement and purpose—and the most unlikely first lady in American history. Slevin follows Obama to the White House from her working-class childhood in Chicago's largely segregated South Side. A book signing will follow the conversation.

Tuesday, May 19 at 6:30PM
Schomburg On Location
Harlem Stage, 150 Convent Avenue, New York City
Wednesday, May 20 at 6:30PM
First Fridays at the Schomburg
Join us for our popular monthly social gathering, where there'll be live music, signature drinks, and extended viewing hours in our galleries!

Friday, May 1 at 6:00PM
First Fridays: Harlem Go Meet-Up
Presents "Harlem Mecca Edition"
Friday, May 4 at 6:30PM
First Fridays: Gay Pride Edition
Friday, August 7 at 6:00PM
First Fridays: House Music Edition

**JUNE**

**MAY**

Monday, May 18 at 6:15PM
From Binaries to Bridges: Black Liberation and Model Minority Mythology
How did racialized notions of masculinity become so closely associated with Blackness? How did the story of Asian American success and racial uplift become so widely accepted? What is the relationship between the two, and what are the implications for today’s racial politics? Join us for a panel discussion exploring Black and Asian American racial formation featuring Schomburg Center Director Khalil Gibran Muhammad and Ellen D. Wu, author of The Color of Success: Asian Americans and the Origins of the Model Minority.

Tuesday, May 12 at 6:30PM
Malcolm X Museum
Join us for the 50th Birthday Celebration of Malcolm X presented by the Malcolm X Museum

Wednesday, May 13 at 7:30PM
James Baldwin and Reckoning with the Path Ahead
As part of The Year of James Baldwin, Harlem Stage presents a dialogue on Baldwin’s view of history and his critique of America with Schomburg Center Director Dr. Khalil Gibran Muhammad and Dr. Friedrich Harris, Pro-Fessor of Political Science and Director of the Center on African-American Politics and Society at Columbia University.
RSVP for free tickets at www.harlemstage.org.

Wednesday, May 6 at 6:30PM
Amistad Rebellion: An Atlantic Drama
Is based on Marcus Rediker’s acclaimed book, Dark Paradise. Join us for a discussion with author Tony Buba about the lives of the Africans who were enslaved and shipwrecked in the early American colonies, and the modern-day community that honored their memory. Tony Award winner Stew and his band will create a very personal, and visionary proclivity for expressing uncomfortable truths. Along with his band, Stew will create a very personal, and visionary proclivity for expressing uncomfortable truths. Along with his band, Stew will create a very personal, and visionary proclivity for expressing uncomfortable truths.

Wednesday, May 6 at 6:30PM
Firefight: The Century-Long Battle to Integrate New York’s Firefighters
Join us for a conversation with Michael Callender, a member of the first generation of firefighters who not only risked their lives as firefighters but also risked their livelihood building an unjust system. FDNY Captain Paul Washington is a black second-generation firefighter, who spent his multi-decade career fighting to get blacks on the job. Firefight is an evocative blend of high-octane firefighting, a critical Civil Rights history, as well as a grassroots struggle for opportunity. A back signing will follow the conversation.

**JUNE**

Monday, June 1 at 7:00PM
**The Literary Society**
The Literary Society makes you to join them for their book club conversation on Toni Morrison's new release, God Help the Child
Nona Hendryx performs at our Women’s Jazz Festival: Tribute to Nona Hendryx.