Ethiopia shall stretch forth her hands to God (Psalm 68 verse 31) became the theme and literal prophesy of the first African-American churches in the United States. "Scholars like St. Clair Drake have discussed the Prophesy as it relates to the philosophy known as Ethiopianism for decades," says chief curator of the Abyssinian exhibition and Schomburg Chief Howard Dodson. According to Drake, whose papers are kept in the Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division of the Schomburg Center, Ethiopianism was essentially the 19th century predecessor to the later Pan African movements of W.E.B. DuBois and Marcus Garvey. "Because it invoked Ethiopia, which was another way of saying Africa, as a place of great pride and a prophetic future," said Dodson. "Churches, schools, and civic associations in the late 1700s and early 1800s were named Africa, and it is fascinating to see it unfold in the history of Abyssinian."

By 1800, Savannah’s First African Baptist Church in Georgia (1788), Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Philadelphia (1791), African Free School (1787), and the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church in New York (1796) were founded. The curators found too that most of the early members of Abyssinian were women. “Women have an extraordinary but often hidden presence throughout the history of Abyssinian,” said Dodson. Twelve women...
This year marked the 15th anniversary of the Schomburg Center’s annual Women’s Jazz Festival. Held each year during the month of March (Women’s History Month), the Festival has provided an opportunity for the Center to showcase the talents of female jazz artists. Over the years, seemingly everyone has appeared: Dee Dee Bridgewater, Abby Lincoln, Regina Carter, Gloria Lynn, Dorothy Donegan, Gerri Allen and Vy Redd to mention just a few. Every Monday night in March, one or two female jazz artists have appeared.

This year, with the support of American Express, we were able to present a rich and diverse program series featuring Toshi Reagon, Lesa Terry, Kaïssa, Jann Parker, the Spelman Jazz Ensemble (a perennial favorite), Ileana Santamaría, Mayra Casales and Gerri Allen. Each of the concerts played to a full and very appreciative audience, but two acts were extraordinary, because of their unique instrumentation. Gerri Allen’s trio of piano, bass and drums was augmented by a young tap dancer named Maurice Chestnut. Chestnut’s tapping became a fourth instrument converting the trio into a quartet and creating rhythmic improvisations that complimented the group and at times challenged the drummer’s rhythmic virtuosity. Gerri was, herself, as fresh and refreshing as ever as pianist, composer, and leader of the group.

Lesa Terry and her Women’s Jazz Quartet closed this year’s concert series with a virtuoso performance on violin but what made her quartet unique was also its instrumentation. In addition to her violin, the group included an upright bass, drums and a harp. That’s right, a jazz harp! The group’s program of original compositions by members and venturesome new arrangements of old jazz and blues standards kept the audience in rapt attention and frequently on their feet! It was a remarkable evening.

Sitting through this year’s series reminded me of the fact that the Schomburg Center has been transformed into something more than a traditional research library over the last two decades or so. Cultural program offerings such as the ones presented in the Women’s Jazz Festival are an indication of that change as are the exhibitions we produce and present, the books and on-line products we publish, and scholarly and educational programs that we offer.

Indicators of this change are also seen in the things we do on a day-to-day basis as well as the ways individuals and organizations have been and are relating to the Center. The president of Liberia, for instance, has asked the Schomburg Center to assist her country in reconstructing its national archives and national library. Both were destroyed in the Liberian civil war. The U.S. Embassy in Bogota, Colombia asked the Center to help the only black university in Colombia plan and develop a national center for documenting the Afro-Colombian presence in the country. Planners of most of the new research libraries and museums on the black experience in the United States have also consulted with the Center in developing their institutions. And the UNESCO Slave Route Project of the United Nations turned to the Schomburg Center to develop its multilingual traveling exhibition on the slave trade. A recent event at the United Nations underscored the evolving role of the Schomburg Center in national and international affairs.

The occasion was the commemoration of the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade. The event was organized by the United Nations and held at their headquarters in New York City. CARICOM (the Caribbean community group of the U.N.) and the agency’s public information arm, sponsored the event. They asked the Schomburg Center to contribute in several ways: to secure speakers for the event; to secure an exhibit to commemorate the occasions; to plan several other commemorative programs and to co-sponsor several of these.

We were able to assist them in securing Mr. Harry Belafonte and Congressman Donald Payne as speakers. We also helped them secure the Tom Feelings exhibit, “Middle Passage.” Payne was invited because he had authored a bill to establish a Commission to Commemorate the Abolition of the U.S. Slave Trade Act. The Schomburg Center assisted Congressman Payne and his staff in drafting the legislation. All of this activity was in response to requests from these organizations and institutions. They all see the Schomburg Center as a resource for the development of their programs and projects. In the minds of our public, the Schomburg Center has become both a source of real expertise and an authentic brand in all things related to the global black experience.
america’s future has a voice! The seventh class of the Schomburg Center Junior Scholars will present their views through a multimedia open letter in theater, dance, spoken word, Internet radio, video, media, research, and visual art on Saturday, May 3, 2008 at their annual Youth Summit. This year’s theme, DEAR AMERICA: expresses a full spectrum of ideas, emotions, and critique born from both historical and contemporary analyses of issues facing young Americans of African descent. The Keynote Speaker will be Dr. Molefi Kete Asante, Professor, Department of African American Studies at Temple University and author of 61 books, including the Encyclopedia of Black Studies.

The Schomburg Center Junior Scholars Program teaches young scholars how to access the resources of the Schomburg Center and enhances their exposure to the greater African and African Diasporan community through program instructors, lecturers, and resource personnel. Through the explorations of Schomburg Center exhibitions, such as Stereotypes vs. Humantypes, Black Art: Treasures from the Schomburg, A Saint in the City: Sufi Arts of Urban Senegal, and The Abyssinian Baptist Church Bicentennial Exhibition, the recent class of Junior Scholars addressed issues of race and image, African and African Diasporan art, and the evolution of the Church as an institution in the black community. This year’s students also had the opportunity to visit the African Burial Ground National Monument memorial, to attend the National Visionary Leadership Project in Washington, D.C. with Dr. Camille Cosby and Rene Poussaint, and to explore the Brooklyn Museum of Art exhibition American Identities & Infinite Islands: Contemporary Caribbean Art.

The Schomburg Center Junior Scholars Program is the only one of its kind in the New York City metro-area that stimulates the growth of inquiring minds and in-depth analyses of issues critical to the African-American community, and that allows a younger group of scholars rare access to the Center’s holdings. For more information about the eighth class of the Junior Scholars Program, please contact Carlyle G. Leach, Director, at cleach@nypl.org or Deirdre L. Hollman, Associate Director, at (212) 491-2234 or dhollman@nypl.org.

Going Beyond the Classroom

These scholarly activities awakened in the Junior Scholars an academic curiosity.
were among the first 15 recorded members of Abyssinian.

Rev. Thomas Paul, the free-born son of a white mother and black father, arrived in New York City in 1808 to organize the congregation. Rev. Paul, like his clergymen brothers Nathaniel and Benjamin Paul, had founded other African-American churches in the northeast, including the First African Baptist Church in Boston in 1805. To the Abyssinian founders, the Ethiopian Prophesy meant that people of African descent have a unique spirituality that would enable them to have a redemptive role in society. Like many early black churches, including nearby AME Zion [later known as the Mother AME Zion Church], Abyssinian felt that the white Christian church needed spiritual and moral guidance to end slavery, bigotry, and set the nation on an ethical and righteous course.

True to its independence, Abyssinian marks its anniversary from its walkout in 1808, not from its approval by First Baptist in 1809. The first church was located at 40 Worth (formerly Anthony) Street, where the congregation resided for nearly 50 years. In 1834, an anti-black riot damaged Abyssinian and nearby AME Zion and St. Philip's African Episcopal Church. On May 18, 1847, Abyssinian pastor Rev. Sampson White was sent to Brooklyn to organize the Concord Baptist Church. Faced with foreclosure, the Worth Street church was sold in 1854. Without a permanent church building, Rev. William Spellman led Abyssinian through nearly a decade at rented churches and halls until purchasing a new church home on Waverly place in 1863. Under Spellman’s leadership, the congregation increased substantially in number. Summer outings on the Hudson River were a favorite pastime. In 1885, Rev. Robert D. Wynn succeeded Spellman in 1885. Wynn actually dreamt once that Abyssinian would move to Harlem. In 1902 he resigned when the congregation refused to move uptown.

Rev. Charles Satchell Morris shared his predecessor Wynn’s vision, and he did succeed in getting the church further uptown. In 1903 Abyssinian moved from Waverly Place, when Rev. Morris purchased a building and an apartment house on West 40th Street, between Seventh and Eighth Avenues. Abyssinian’s new location was in the Tenderloin District, described by W.E.B. DuBois as the city’s “most dangerous slum.” Through its first 100 years, 16 pastors had served at Abyssinian. Remarkably, only four senior pastors were to preside over the next century. Rev. Adam Clayton Powell, Sr. was called to pastor in December 1908, the centennial anniversary of the church’s founding. A month earlier his son, Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. was born. Rev. Powell, Sr. ushered in a new era in the church’s history, adding to its spiritual agenda an extraordinary social and civic ministry. More than a decade later, he succeeded in convincing the congregation of Abyssinian to purchase a site for a new church in Harlem. A new church was built at 138th Street in 1923.

On January 11, 1928, congregants of Abyssinian filled the sanctuary of their five-year old stone structure to witness and participate in the historic ritual exercise—the mortgage burning. The debt had been paid off in four...
and a half years rather than the 12-year contract term. The church's move to Harlem and mortgage burning marked the beginning of an explosive period of growth and service that by the 1950s would make Abyssinian one of the largest and most renowned Protestant churches in the United States. This now fully independent black-owned Baptist Church would help define Harlem as the cultural, political, and social capitol of black America and would serve as a center of the social justice movement in Harlem and throughout the United States.

Powell Jr. succeeded his father as pastor in 1937. He continued to pursue the church's social justice agenda—fighting joblessness, hunger, homelessness, and racial discrimination. Elected to the New York City Council in 1941, his next step took the mission to the nation's capitol. Elected to the United States Congress in 1944, Powell Jr. served, except for one brief and volatile period of interruption, until the year before his death in 1972. Powell Jr. orchestrated passage of much of President John F. Kennedy’s education legislation and he was instrumental in the passage of President Lyndon B. Johnson's “Great Society” programs.

In 1972 Rev. Dr. Samuel D. Proctor, was the former President of Virginia Union and North Carolina A&T Universities as well as the Martin Luther King Professor at Rutgers University, succeeded Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. as the 19th pastor of Abyssinian Baptist Church. Within months of his arrival, Calvin O. Butts, III, a graduate student at Union Theological Seminary joined his staff as a ministerial assistant. Between them, they would lead Abyssinian Baptist Church into the next phase of its development. When Rev. Dr. Butts succeeded Dr. Proctor in 1989 as Senior Pastor, he expanded his predecessor’s initiatives and built upon his own. Concerned with the degree to which tobacco and liquor advertisers were targeting black communities in general and Harlem in particular, he organized demonstrations against billboard advertising in those communities. His commitment to involve Abyssinian more fully in the redevelopment of Harlem inspired him to establish the Abyssinian Development Corporation, a housing and commercial development agency dedicated to fostering the redevelopment of Harlem's economic infrastructure.

In 1999, Dr. Calvin O. Butts, III, was named President of the State University of New York College at Old Westbury, a position he has held concurrently with his leadership of Abyssinian since that time. In an exhibition display case, the pulpit bible used by Rev. Powell Sr. is open to the Psalms 68:31. “Princes shall come out of Egypt; Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God.” In the fall of 2007, on the eve of the 200th Anniversary, Dr. Butts led a pilgrimage of Abyssinian members to their namesake and ancestral homeland.

The Abyssinian Baptist Church Bicentennial Exhibition is on view at the Schomburg Center until May 31, 2008.
Senegal, Continued from page 1

taken in 1913 and reproduced in a book—it has been the inspiration for numerous artistic renderings of the saint. The dynamic works of art in A Saint in the City, coupled with insights into Mouridism from the artists—attest to the vibrancy of this artistic movement in Senegal and the devotion of those who create and appreciate these works. A Saint wonderfully explores the visual culture of the Muslim Mouride Brotherhood of Senegal.

The Mouride Brotherhood, one of four Sufi brotherhoods in Senegal, has more than four million followers in Senegal and scores more across the world. For instance, New York City has the largest Mouride community in the United States. A Saint in the City is the first major exhibition in the United States dedicated to Senegal and the first to introduce audiences to the striking range of 20th century Mouride arts. These include Sheikh Amadou Bamba in many media, large-scale popular murals and signs, intricate glass paintings, healing verses inscribed in stunning calligraphic styles, colorful textiles, and paintings by internationally recognized contemporary artists. This exhibition celebrates the power of images in the everyday lives of Senegalese people, and demonstrates how these images are reshaping urban environments to express the vitality of contemporary African life.

Please make a visit to the Schomburg Center to explore A Saint in the City, before it closes on May 31.

A Saint in the City: Sufi Arts of Urban Senegal was organized and produced by the Fowler Museum at UCLA, and curated by Dr. Mary Nooter Roberts and Dr. Allen F. Roberts in collaboration with Senegalese community leaders and artists in both Dakar and Los Angeles. It was made possible by a major grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities, promoting excellence in the humanities. Additional support was provided by the UCLA James S. Coleman African Studies Center.

The current exhibition of A Saint in the City: Sufi Arts of Urban Senegal at the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture has been made possible thanks to several institutions at Columbia University: The Institute for Religion, Culture and Public Life; the Institute of African Studies; and the Center for the Study of Democracy, Tolerance, and Religion.
Over the past few years, New York has become the capital of Mouridism in the United States. The Mourides are scattered throughout the country and important communities thrive in Chicago, Cincinnati, Atlanta, Raleigh, Winston-Salem, and Washington, D.C. But New York City is still the main destination of Senegalese immigrants. Mourides are estimated to be from 5,000 to 7,000 in New York and another 7,000 live in the rest of the country. According to some sources most Senegalese in America belong to the Mouride brotherhood.

Senegalese immigration to New York started in the 1980s and saw a large increase in the 1990s. In the early days, the Mourides were highly visible in Manhattan as street vendors. They were mostly young rural men. They started to diversify their activities in the 1990s. Today, Mouride men and women own travel agencies, stores, restaurants, wholesale and shipping businesses, money transfer companies, taxi services, and braiding salons. Other Mourides are high school teachers, university professors, store managers, or work in business and finance.

Once concentrated in midtown, Mourides have settled uptown as well as in Brooklyn and the Bronx. Officially, at least 1,000 Senegalese, most of them Mourides, live in Central Harlem where they represent a quarter of the total African-born population. Along 116th Street, an area they have revitalized and that is now known as Little Senegal, Mouride men and women have opened several stores and restaurants.

Their strong work ethics and discipline, allied to their ascetism and frugality, enable them not only to prosper here but also to support their families and religious community at home, as well as finance development projects in Senegal. In 1989, a group of Mourides founded the Mourid Islamic Community in America (MICA), based in Harlem. It operates Radio Murid International and broadcasts a weekly television program, “Voice of Touba”. It also publishes a newsletter in English and Wolof, the national language of Senegal. Also in 1989, the Borough of Manhattan—with support from then Mayor David Dinkins and Harlem Congressman Charles E. Rangel—designated July 28 “Sheikh Amadou Bamba Day” in New York City. Every year since then thousands of Mouride men, women, and children, march in the Sheikh’s honor in Harlem. Dynamic, disciplined, close-knit, and hard-working, the Mourides in America are a true immigrant success story.
Around the Schomburg Center

Ruby Dee with Haki Madhubuti at the 90th Birthday celebration for Gwendolyn Brooks and the 40th Anniversary of Third World Press on November 16, 2007.

Concert Pianist William Chapman Nyaho performed a repertoire of classical works by composers from Africa and the African Diaspora on Friday, December 14, 2007.


Scholars-in-Residence Malinda Lindquist and Chad Williams with Keith Ellison, 5th Congressional District, Minnesota, during the Congressman’s recent visit to the Schomburg Center in February.

Abyssinian Pastor Dr. Calvin O. Butts, III during the members’ preview for the bicentennial exhibition on February 1, 2008.

Ruby Dee hosted a special reading of *The People of Clarendon County*, which was written and directed by her late husband Ossie Davis on Friday, February 8, 2008. The three-day reading was presented by Woodie King’s National Black Touring Circuit.

Actors Glynn Turman, Lynne Whitfield, and Ruben Santiago Ruben also read from *The People of Clarendon County*.

The Honorable David N. Dinkins reading from *The People of Clarendon County*. 
AVAILABLE NOW!


The second edition of The Encyclopedia of African-American Culture and History (Thomson Gale) is a six-volume, comprehensive compendium of knowledge on the historical and cultural development of people of African descent at the beginning of the 21st century. A product of the most recent scholarship on the African-American and African Diasporan experience, The Encyclopedia offers a convenient introduction to this vast array of information. Note: Limited sets are available to Schomburg Society members beginning at the Supporter level ($100 and above) at a special price of $300 (Regular price is $695).

ON-LINE SERVICES

Schomburg Studies on the Black Experience

The Schomburg Studies on the Black Experience, a digital archive of 30 volumes on major themes in African Diasporan history and culture available on-line by Pro-Quest to colleges and universities on a subscription basis, has been updated. The latest version features 30 essays written by an academic expert and features a timeline, images, and an extensive bibliography. Also included in this edition is “American Political Systems and the Response of the Black Community.”

The archive provides groundbreaking work from the foremost experts in the field. These leading scholars have selected core articles and book chapters that illustrate the best research and writing in a variety of disciplines, including history, religion, sociology, political science, economics, art, literature, and psychology. Presented in essay form, the writing is self-contained but links together to provide an exhaustive, interdisciplinary survey of the experience of peoples of African descent. While centered on African Americans, the survey examines African and Afro-Caribbean experiences as well. Schomburg Studies on the Black Experience presents ongoing debates and controversies in a thought-provoking and engaging way with the goal of encouraging continuing scholarship.

The Abolition of the Slave Trade Web site

Launching in May 2008

Please visit www.schomburgcenter.org to access The Abolition of the Slave Trade Web site. This site, as part of the commemoration of the bicentennial of the 1808 U.S. abolition of the transatlantic slave trade, will examine the slave trade to the U.S. from the beginning to 1807, as well as the multidimensional Africans’ resistance to it from Africa to the Americas.

UPCOMING EVENTS!

Carnegie Neighborhood Series

Gino Sitson
Sunday, April 20, 2008
3 p.m.

Award-winning, New York–based Cameroonian vocal virtuoso Gino Sitson comes from a long line of musicians known as Ntontas (“players of horns”). Early in his life Sitson was introduced to blues, jazz, and African traditional music and developed a unique style, incorporating African polyphonic techniques into the jazz vocal tradition. He is the pioneer of a new generation of multiculturally influenced African musicians who are integrating their own “in-between” living experiences (north/south, traditional/modern, 20th/21st century) into their musical styles. Sitson explores the use of both his voice and body, combining vocal acrobatics with amazing body percussion.

Cabello Rolim and Korimbatasamb
Sunday, April 27, 2008
3 p.m.

Born in São Paolo, Brazil, Cabello Rolim keeps the traditions of his ancestors alive by dedicating his life’s work to the study and performance of the rhythms, instruments,

Lest We Forget: The Triumph Over Slavery, a postcard book by the Schomburg Center and Pomegranate Communications

This beautiful postcard book captures some of the highlights of the international exhibition bearing the same name. It features 30 cards made up of photographs, art, and documents that tell the story of a people’s journey to freedom.

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songs, and dances of Afro-Brazilian culture. A professional capoeirista with 20 years’ experience, Rolim is a student and practitioner of capoeira, the legendary Afro-Brazilian art form combining music, martial arts, and dance that was invented by African slaves and brought to Brazil centuries ago by the Portuguese.

Neighborhood Concerts are funded in part by the New York City Council and Department of Cultural Affairs. Additional support is provided by The Max and Victoria Dreyfus Foundation. Programs of The Weill Music Institute at Carnegie Hall are generously supported by the City of New York: Michael R. Bloomberg, Mayor; Kate D. Levin, Commissioner, Department of Cultural Affairs; and Christine Quinn, Speaker, New York City Council; and by the New York State Council on the Arts: Mary Schmidt Campbell, Chair.

Junior Scholars Youth Summit: Dear America
Saturday, May 3, 2008
9:30 a.m.

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Damond Haynes, Events Coordinator
Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture
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A Message from the National Membership Chair

Knowing our legacy—undistorted by others and documented by those who lived it—correctly aligns you and me and our children in the continuing struggle to fully claim our dignity in all areas of life.

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Dr. Maya Angelou

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