Here to stay: The Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture

By PAUL LECLERC

President, the New York Public Library

The Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, a research center of the New York Public Library, is recognized worldwide as one of the leading institutions of its kind. For more than 80 years, the center has collected, preserved and provided free access to materials documenting Black life, and promoted the study and interpretation of the history and culture of peoples of African descent.

We welcome this opportunity to share with you the commitment from NYPL that the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture is here to stay. There has never been any thought whatsoever of moving the Schomburg. Harlem is its home, and it is where the Schomburg is going to be forever.

This is not to say that there are not challenges ahead.

As many of you know, Dr. Howard Dodson, who has had a remarkable 25-year legacy of achievement and leadership at the Schomburg, is retiring. We are now engaged in a search for a unique individual to take up the helm at the Schomburg and guarantee that it remains a source of pride for the people of Harlem and a go-to resource for all those who want to learn about the history of the African Diaspora throughout the world.

Library trustees Dr. Henry Lewis "Skip" Gates Jr. and Gordon Davis have graciously agreed to serve as co-chairs of the search committee for the next director of the Schomburg. Skip has been devoted to the Schomburg since he was a student writing history papers and has served on advisory and fundraising committees for the Schomburg Center for more than a decade. Gordon is a long-time colleague and champion of Howard and his accomplishments. Together, they are assembling a working group of scholars, students and community leaders, who will ensure that the Schomburg’s collections and programs flourish for generations to come.

We look forward to engaging you directly in the coming months so that you, too, can share with us how the Schomburg can better service the needs of our different audiences—locally and the world over.

On a more urgent front, like all publicly funded institutions, the NYPL is facing severe budget cuts. The New York City Council will be deciding in the next few days on the level of funding cuts to libraries...cuts that could severely impact the Schomburg’s ability to continue to deliver all of its services, and to continue to grow and thrive.

You can make the difference in these last few days. Visit http://dontclosethebook.nypl.org to send a message to your elected official on the City Council and the mayor. Every letter and every call counts.

The second and equally important way to make a difference is to visit the Schomburg. History and Harlem’s finest are alive at the Schomburg! Bring your children and your grandchildren to sit and listen from among some 5,000 hours of African-American oral history spoken by social warriors such as Malcolm X and Marcus Garvey.

Invite visiting family and friends to come and view unique treasures like the original manuscripts of Richard Wright or Phillis Wheatley and to see original paintings by Jacob Lawrence and Romare Bearden.

For those who can’t visit in person, let them know about Digital Schomburg, where they can see online exhibitions about African-Americans and American politics—from Crispus Attucks to President Barack Obama—and have a front-row seat to “The African Burial Ground of Harlem: 1900-1940: An African-American Community.”

The Schomburg is a treasure trove of millions of art objects, rare audio and videotapes, books, manuscripts, motion picture films, newspapers, periodicals, photographs, prints, recorded music discs and sheet music. It is a unique and improbable history of achievement, and it is here to serve.

Let’s all work to ensure that the Schomburg is always...here to stay.