AFRICANA HERITAGE

A NEWSLETTER FOR SCHOMBURG SOCIETY MEMBERS

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Q&A with Artist Xenobia Bailey

Celebrating Harry Belafonte and More!
Ruth Ann Stewart (1942—2014)

By every measure Ruth Ann Stewart helped pour the foundation of the international repository and celebrated research library that we know today. She was transformative. Stewart had just the right mix of personality—charming, whip-smart, and opinionated. It didn’t matter if you had a PhD. If she had an opinion, you would hear it. But that part of her personality—that force of spirit and nature and no-nonsense style—made her the indomitable leader she was. In the language of today’s corporate speak, Stewart was Schomburg’s first turnaround specialist, creatively destroying old practices and disruptively innovating new ones.

In the early days, the Schomburg was still just a special collection of non-circulating items in a branch library. By the time Stewart arrived in the early 1970s, the collection had reached a crisis state of decay. Precious manuscript materials and rare books had been under attack from heat and humidity, year after year. Items barely survived year in and year out, repairing and restoring. The backlog of uncatalogued items plummeted. Mice, moths, and microfiche holdings grew exponentially. The Ford Foundation began to fund preservation. The Moving Image and Recorded Sound Division opened and plans proceeded for a major expansion under the architectural vision of Max Bond. Stewart did the day-to-day work to make all of this happen.

I remember the last time she walked the corridors of the Schomburg last winter. She reminisced about meeting her husband, Pulitzer Prize-winning historian David Levering Lewis, in the old reading room that is now the Exhibition Hall (featured here in the photo), where he regularly sat. As she toured the facility and met new staff and curators, she eyed everyone and everything carefully and curiously. And in her ginger gait as she moved from one space to another, I saw the weight of pride and propriety that was her signature. She cared deeply for this place. The weight of cancer and fatigue moved from one space to another, I saw curiously. And in her ginger gait as she walked, her last day was, but the weight of pride and propriety that was her signature. She cared deeply for this place.

She bridged the old and the new. She shaped nearly half of the life of a 90-year-old institution.”

Tammi Lawson (pictured left), Assistant Curator of Art and Artifacts at the Schomburg Center, chats with Harlem artist Xenobia Bailey (pictured right), whose upcoming work, Functional Vibrations, was commissioned for the 2015 MTA Arts for Transit 34th Street–Hudson Yards #7 Subway Project.

“The culture of funk is the germinating, everlasting element of the life cycle.” —Xenobia Bailey

Tammi Lawson: Where did you study? Xenobia Bailey: I first studied at the University of Washington as a recruited affirmative action student of the 1970s. I think that’s where my passion to preserve the rich urban culture of funk comes from—my not wanting to surrender my “Blackground” in the process of getting a higher education. Then I was attracted to their Graduate Music Department of Ethnomusicology. I was captivated by the craftsmanship of the musical instruments, temples, furnishings, textiles, and clothing of the high courts and everyday household artifacts. This led me to Seattle Community College to study tailoring and millinery. Then I transferred to the Pratt Institute in New York to study industrial design.

TL: How has music influenced or informed your work? XB: African-American music is the only African-American cultural experience that has consistently developed and evolved in this country ever since the Emancipation Proclamation. I follow the path music has paved in tracing African-American design.

TL: What is funk? XB: The culture of funk is the germinating, everlasting element of the life cycle. Artists/practitioners of the aesthetic of funk are the host, the parasite, the co-creator and the product. The science of the aesthetic of funk is being conscious and sensitive enough to compose and conduct the information of the vibrational frequency of atomic and cellular cosmic beings—as it relates to sustaining a wholesome animated lifestyle.

TL: Have you ever been discouraged and felt like giving up? XB: I’ve got disappointed, tired, disillusioned all of the time. But I never feel like quitting. I have no choice but to figure out how to make it work for me the next time. I believe in searching for breakthroughs when problems appear. There is a great deal of disappointment that comes with being an artist. But the victories and success snap all of the trials and tribulations together.
Harry Belafonte’s Inspiring Career Takes Center Stage

By Shola Lynch, Curator for the Moving Image and Recorded Sound Division

In 2013, the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences invited me to create a short documentary to commemorate the life and career of the 87-year-old Harry Belafonte, which was shown just before he took the stage to receive the Jean Hersholt Humanitarian Award at the Governors Awards in November. I was honored to reintroduce Hollywood’s most powerful African-American actor, singer, songwriter, actor, movie producer, and activist. As I look back at this remarkable moment, I remember how the audience watched the documentary in silence, mesmerized by the footage of Belafonte’s influential career as a singer, songwriter, actor, movie producer, and activist.

To commemorate our time at the Schomburg, the pre-professionals worked together on a project that helped us use the resources of the Schomburg and the Bank of New York Mellon, the Bank of New York Mellon. As I look back at this remarkable experience, I am more than grateful for the opportunities that the Schomburg Pre-Professional Program offered.

What It Means to Be a Schomburg Pre-Professional

By Farrah Lopez, Communications Pre-Professional

Each semester, in collaboration with the Bank of New York Mellon, the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture provides undergraduate and graduate students the opportunity to gain experience in their preferred fields. While earning a competitive compensation through the Pre-Professional Development Program, but as a pre-professional in the communications department last fall, my experience went far beyond professional training, mentorship and a paycheck. I also learned invaluable knowledge about black history. After speaking with my fellow pre-professionals, I realized we all took something special away from our time at the Schomburg.

Jobert Bienvenue’s experience as a pre-professional in the Education division encouraged him to reflect on growing up together on a project that helped us use the resources of the Schomburg and the Bank of New York Mellon. As I look back at this remarkable experience, I am more than grateful for the opportunities that the Schomburg Pre-Professional Program offered.

Schomburg Pre-Professionals take center stage (left to right): Lauren Alexander, Farrah Lopez, Taire Richardson, Michael Santillana, and Christopher Stahling.

School of Film and Television

Gentlemen, ladies, and other individuals who represent the world of African-American film history, I would like to introduce you to a young man who has been a part of my life since I was a child.

Born and raised in Harlem, New York,Greaves graduated from Stuyvesant High School in 1944 and briefly attended City College of New York to study science and engineering before dropping out. Despite his aptitude for math and science, it was acting that he was drawn to. He became a regular at both the Schomburg’s American Negro Theatre and The Actors Studio in New York City. He also landed roles in black films like Miracle in Harlem (1948). But the limited and stereotypical roles frustrated him. Greaves later wrote, “It became clear to me that unless we black people began to produce information for screen and television, there would always be a distortion of the black image.”

So he turned to production. But after racial roadblocks in the U.S. hindered him from entry-level union positions, he headed north to Canada where there was more opportunity. He quickly landed a job with the National Film Board and spent eight years working his way up the production ranks to editor, writer, and director, while also contributing to more than eighty films. By the mid-1960s, Greaves returned to New York where he started William Greaves Productions, through which he made documentaries for the United Nations and the United States Information Agency. In the wake of Martin Luther King Jr.’s assassination in 1968, public television set a mandate for black programming and Greaves jumped at the opportunity. He executive produced and co-hosted Black Journal, a long-format public affairs news show “by, for and about Black people” that employed and trained a whole new generation of young filmmakers.

Over the next decade, Greaves directed films important to black history and culture on topics ranging from Muhammad Ali to Ida B. Wells, the Harlem Renaissance to The Black Arts Movement, and continued to work up until his death last August. Though he is gone, his legacy will remain for future generations through his body of work held at Schomburg’s William Greaves Collection in the Moving Image and Recorded Sound Division, which includes 500 boxes of film related to more than 19 documentaries.

William Greaves (1926 – 2014)

W illiam Greaves stood among the giants in the industry of documentary filmmaking. His pioneering style, storytelling, and techniques set a modern documentary standard that continues to be celebrated and studied today. From the 1960s through the 1980s, Greaves directed and produced a prolific number of films chronicling the Black Power movement—through the friction of integration and the striving of the black middle class, offering a nuanced view of blackness that could not be found in other movies or TV.

Though his colleagues and critics dubbed him the “Chronicler of the Black Experience,” it was a moniker he disliked. Greaves said, “I ghettoized him as a black filmmaker rather than a filmmaker who is black.” But despite these reservations, he had a deeper impulse “to make films that expressed a black perspective.”

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**Black Life Matters**
February 2 – August 15, 2015
Exhibition Hall
Latimer/Edison Gallery

This Curators’ Choice exhibition launches the Schomburg’s 90th anniversary year with an eclectic array of rarely seen collection materials that affirm the Schomburg’s mission to document and preserve black life, history, and culture. Selections curated from each research division include works by photojournalist Richard Saunders, African-American children’s books, letters written between literary and political figures, 20th-century black artists and illustrators, rare documentary films, historical audio recordings, and selections from the Schomburg’s extensive LP collection.

The invitation for the Members’ Preview on January 29, 2015 has been mailed.

**Curators’ Choice**
Black Life Matters

**Upcoming Exhibition**

**Immigration, Migration, and the Transformation of the African-American Community in the 20th and 21st Centuries**

The NEH Summer Institute for Schoolteachers, *Immigration, Migration, and the Transformation of the African-American Community in the 20th and 21st Centuries*, explores the politics of free movement that has shaped identity, ethnicity and culture within the black community and democracy. Over the course of three weeks, the Institute leads teachers through an innovative learning series that includes lectures by distinguished scholars, seminars, research, curriculum labs, films, exhibition visits, and extensive interactions with the library’s digital collections.


**Application Deadline:** March 2, 2015

**Questions?** Email [schomburged@nypl.org](mailto:schomburged@nypl.org)

For more, contact [schomburgeducation@nypl.org](mailto:schomburgeducation@nypl.org)

Any views, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this publication do not necessarily represent those of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Images: *In Motion* online exhibition.

**Schomburg Education**

**AMPLIFYING YOUTH VOICES**
The Schomburg Center Junior Scholars Program Kicks Off Its 13th Year!

By Deirdre Lynn Hollman, Director of Education and Exhibitions

BLACK YOUTH MATTER! Last October the Junior Scholars Program welcomed its 13th class, 130 young people from across the city, to do work that Arthur Schomburg used to describe as “digging up the past to remake the future.” Reflecting the social, political, and cultural footprint of American society, this year’s curriculum explores youth cultures and education in black communities, post-civil rights history, hip-hop studies, and family histories. The fall semester began with a reading of Carter G. Woodson’s *The Mis-Education of the Negro*, and culminated in the youth-led town hall, Junior Scholars Teen Talk: Mass-Hallucination Ill Education, which provided a rare platform for teens to voice their thoughts on Woodson’s text in the social context of the #blacklivesmatter protests happening across the country. You can view the Teen Talk on the Schomburg’s livestream archive at [www.new.livestream.com/schomburgcenter](http://www.new.livestream.com/schomburgcenter).

It is a legacy year for the program as we welcome two Junior Scholars alumni, Marcus Charles and Tarik Bell, to the staff of instructors. We are also very proud to launch the 1st Annual Richard T. Greene Leadership Talk and Scholarships this spring. For more information about the Junior Scholars Program, Schomburg’s unique Saturday academy aimed at increasing young people’s historical and cultural literacy, college and career readiness, and community activism, visit [www.schomburgcenter.org/juniorscholars](http://www.schomburgcenter.org/juniorscholars).

The Schomburg Junior Scholars program is made possible through the generous support of The David Rockefeller Fund; Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito, Council Member Inez Dickens, the New York City Council; The Carver Bank/Richard T. Greene Memorial Scholarship Fund; and individual donors.

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Images: *In Motion* online exhibition.
Sylviane A. Diouf, Ph.D., Director of the Lapidus Center for the Historical Analysis of Transatlantic Slavery, traces a tumultuous era of African culture in India last fall—just when the Schomburg Center’s exhibition, *Africans in India: A Rediscovery*, opened in New Delhi.

The 50 beautifully illustrated panels of high-ranking officials, generals, and rulers that make up *Africans in India* never felt more significant than when the exhibition made its way to New Delhi last fall. Opening amid racist attacks against Africans in the Indian capital, the exhibit represents a history when Africans and Indians both coexisted and prospered as leaders in the country—from Chief Ministers to founders of princely states.

Below is Sylviane’s timeline of the events surrounding the exhibition’s opening in New Delhi:

**September 28:** Incident at the Rajiv Chowk Metro Station. In a violent scene that went viral on YouTube, three African students from Gabon and Burkina Faso were beaten with iron bars, sticks, and glass shards by a mob. “We were traveling on the metro when a few guys started taking our pictures,” the students recounted. “When we asked them why, they started misbehaving, which led to the metro staff taking us and those guys to the police officers’ cabin. Even there, they kept saying racist comments, which made us furious and it led to a fight. We were beaten up badly. A few feet away from the large crowd, we saw people laughing, snapping pictures, and yelling ‘Bharat Mata ki jai’ (Victory to Mother India). Two policemen were looking on.”

**October 4:** Siddarth Varadarajan, Editor in Chief of *The Times of India*, weighs in. “The flash mob that appeared and disappeared at the metro station that day was summoned to the spot by the triumphalism and crassness that India’s rise on the world stage is generating amongst the urban middle class. As the middle class prospers, it is becoming more insular, more intolerant, more anxious. No one ever told them that as we strive for—and insist on—a bigger share of global power for ourselves, we need to learn how to accommodate the world, to grow less small.”

**October 8:** *Africans in India* opening at the Indira Gandhi National Center for the Arts. At sunset, I lit a wick (the traditional Indian way) to open the *Africans in India* exhibition. The ceremony, which took place in the immense gardens of the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, cast a different tone as the recent events were at the front of everyone’s minds. The attack had generated media coverage not only in India, but also in Africa, the Caribbean, Europe, and the United States. As we celebrated the past with the exhibition opening, there was no escaping the distressing reality of the present. The exhibition—and the subsequent curatorial discussion and conference—became important teaching moments. A large number of schools visited *Africans in India*, which will hopefully help young students grow up with an appreciation for the multicultural, multiracial meritocracy (outside of the Hindu caste system) that was India for so long. What happened there could, indeed, be a lesson to the world.
The following calendar highlights are from our full program schedule. For the most complete and up-to-date program information, please visit schomburgcenter.org/calendar.

**FEBRUARY**

**Thursday, February 12 at 6:30 pm**
**From Dagger to Dollar: The Exquisite and Enduring Style of Harlem Men**
MAD Free & The Schomburg Center present a multi-platform conversation celebrating style, creativity, and self-expression of black men through style uniquely found in Harlem. Michaela Angela Davis, Bever Smith, and special style guests lead a discussion on identity, culture, and style. Dress Harlem sharp for a chance to be part of a live fashion shoot and digital show.

**Wednesday, February 18 at 6:30 pm**
**American Policing: Lessons on Resistance**
Wednesday, February 18 at 6:30 pm

**FEBRUARY COMMEMORATION OF THE AMERICAN NEGRO THEATRE**

Wednesday, March 23 at 7:00 pm
Celebrate Women’s History Month at the Schomburg Center’s Women’s Jazz Festival. Some of New York’s best female performers come together to give praise to those who led the way. Co-musical director Toshi Reagon will be featured.

**MARCH**

**Wednesday, February 25 at 2:00 pm**
Before 5: Gallery Talks with Schomburg Curators
Join the curators of Black Life Matters for a walk-through and Q&A on rare collections items on display. Before 5 is a series featuring premier evening events for our daytime audience.

**APRIL**

**Wednesday, April 22 at 2:00 pm**
Before 5: The American Negro Theatre
Before 5 is a series featuring premiere evening events for our daytime audience. For its 75th anniversary, join Michael Dennis for an afternoon commemoration of the African Negro Theatre.

Your Membership Questions Answered

A s we begin 2015 and a new membership cycle, you may want to take a moment to remind yourself about last year’s changes in membership. By asking all members to support us at the start of the year, we are able to better allocate funds for the Schomburg’s programs and services. While we had a great response to our renewal mailing last year, we know these changes can take some getting used to. Here are some frequently asked questions about our new annual renewal:

What’s an annual membership? How is it different than monthly?
An annual membership means that we will invite all Schomburg Society members to renew in January of each year, rather than a year from the month when you last made your membership contribution. We switched to help more of your dollars go right to Schomburg initiatives.

I gave in the spring last year—why do I have to renew in January?
While we prefer that you renew earlier in the year, you don’t have to! Please feel free to give anytime in the calendar year that works for you. However, to ease the budget, we’re mailing everyone at the same time of year. Feel free to hold on to your renewal until whatever month you prefer to give.

Do I still get a full year of benefits? ABSOLUTELY! We will not shortchange any of your benefits or invitations because of this change in schedule. You will still be invited to events and receive Africana Heritage for a full year after your membership gift.

What’s the difference between the plastic card and paper card?
Nothing. Your new, plastic membership card will be sent to you at the beginning of each year in advance of your membership gift. When you give your card will become active. If you lose it, or need a new one, we’ll reprint a card for you.

I renewed at the end of 2014. Why did I get another request?
If you made a contribution in November or December, thank you! Gifts made to an appeal at the end of the year are treated as special, and completely tax-deductible donations, unless you specified otherwise.

If you’d like to reallocate that gift for your membership renewal, please give us a call and we’ll make the change!

More questions? Call us! You can always feel free to call us at 212-491-2352 or email at schomburgsociety@nypl.org. We’ll answer any questions you may have. As always, thank you for your support of the Schomburg Center!
Funk musician George Clinton sharing stories about his life and career on the occasion of the publication of his new book, *Brothas Be, Yo Like George, Ain’t That Funkin’ Kinda Hard on You?: A Memoir*. 

Around the **Schomburg**

**AFRICANA** HerITAGE