Honoring the Legacy of Arturo Schomburg

Looking Ahead and Celebrating What's To Come

PLUS
Dr. Muhammad Says Farewell
An interview with Poet-In-Residence Sonia Sanchez
A Tribute to Black Broadway
50 Years of the Black Power Movement
Farewell and Thank You
By Dr. Khalil Gibran Muhammad, Director of the Schomburg Center

The last five years at the Schomburg Center have been immensely fulfilling and the highlight of my career. I’ve had the opportunity to work with the most dedicated and passionate library and archival professionals in the world. They, like each and every one of you, our devoted members, have taught me something about why this institution is so important. And you have shown me in countless ways the incredible difference and impact the Schomburg Center makes in all of our lives. When I walked through those doors and was fortunate enough to meet many of you in person for the first time, I had no idea how much my life would be enriched. It is with an abiding love for this place that I write to inform you that I will be leaving the Schomburg Center to take a position at Harvard University.

On July 1, 2016, I will begin a tenured position as Professor of History, Race, and Public Policy at the Harvard Kennedy School and join the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study as the Suzanne Young Murray Professor. Given the challenges of racial and social injustice sweeping the nation, I am compelled to offer research and ideas to help solve some of our nation’s biggest problems. Because of what we have achieved together—by helping the Schomburg Center to take a position as Professor of History, Race, and Public Policy at the Harvard Kennedy School and join the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study as the Suzanne Young Murray Professor—our organization can continue to grow and flourish.

I write to inform you that I will be leaving the Schomburg Center to take a position at Harvard University. On July 1, 2016, I will begin a tenured position as Professor of History, Race, and Public Policy at the Harvard Kennedy School and join the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study as the Suzanne Young Murray Professor. Given the challenges of racial and social injustice sweeping the nation, I am compelled to offer research and ideas to help solve some of our nation’s biggest problems. Because of what we have achieved together—by helping the Schomburg Center to take a position as Professor of History, Race, and Public Policy at the Harvard Kennedy School and join the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study as the Suzanne Young Murray Professor—our organization can continue to grow and flourish.

Given the challenges of racial and social injustice sweeping the nation, I am compelled to offer research and ideas to help solve some of our nation’s biggest problems. Because of what we have achieved together—by helping the Schomburg Center to take a position as Professor of History, Race, and Public Policy at the Harvard Kennedy School and join the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study as the Suzanne Young Murray Professor—our organization can continue to grow and flourish.

With your unwavering commitment, we have so much to be proud of and so much more to look forward to as the Schomburg settles in for its next 90 years. Over the past five years, we have achieved record growth with over 300,000 visitors annually, an average increase of 34% since 2012. With your help, we have raised over $31 million in support of our innovative public programs and exhibitions, collection digitization, and paid internships for college students. New educational and scholarly initiatives are also the bounty of this harvest, including the Teen Curators Program, the National Urban League Historical Awareness Project for Youth, and the Lapidus Center for the Historical Analysis of Transatlantic Slavery, with its world-class collection of 400 rare books. And with the $2.2 million renovation and expansion project, we will modernize the infrastructure, renovate three reading rooms, create a Youth Exhibition Gallery, and build a new gift shop and conference room.

Of course, having our most successful gala ever, receiving the IMLS National Medal from First Lady Michelle Obama, and welcoming so many wonderful new faces through our doors have made celebrating our 90th year all the sweeter. There’s truly been a lot to be thankful for because of what we’ve accomplished together. I am extremely grateful for having been entrusted with leading this exceptional institution and for earning your trust and confidence. Who will be the next director? Rest assured that I am doing my part to ensure the next director will land smoothly at 135th and Malcolm X Blvd. A search process is under way, led by the same team that found me and a search committee of smart and thoughtful leaders. Just remember, the Schomburg Center depends on all of us. It runs on the hard work and talent of the amazing staff and managers. It leads with the full faith and commitment of its Society members. No matter who the next director is, you will have their back and, just as in my case, that will make all the difference.

And as we have been since we first opened our doors in 1926, the Schomburg was once again at the center of this important moment with our revitalized "Theater Talk" series. Actors from Oscar winner Forest Whitaker, who made his Broadway debut in the race-bending title role in Hughie this year, to Cynthia Erivo of The Color Purple: The Musical, were given a platform on our stage to discuss the significance of a diverse Broadway presence. For the first time in a long while, black talent is being represented both on stage and behind the scenes. In fact, this is the year that Eclipsed made history as the first ever Broadway show, exclusively written by, directed by, and starring black women. Now that’s something worth talking about.

So as we continue to celebrate and discuss this new Black Theater Movement, let’s also remember the talent who paved the way, including Lorraine Hansberry, August Wilson, Ruby Dee, and so many others. This is our time. —K.G.

A New Black Theater Movement Comes to the Schomburg

It’s fitting that as we celebrate the 75th anniversary of the American Negro Theatre, and close out a banner 90th season of the Schomburg Center, we’re also experiencing a Black Broadway Renaissance. Just when Hollywood had all but abandoned the idea of diversity, productions like Straight Outta Compton, and Hamilton, nurture fresh talent and usher new audiences to the theater. As we have been since we first opened our doors in 1926, the Schomburg was once again at the center of this important moment with our revitalized "Theater Talk" series. Actors from Oscar winner Forest Whitaker, who made his Broadway debut in the race-bending title role in Hughie this year, to Cynthia Erivo of The Color Purple: The Musical, were given a platform on our stage to discuss the significance of a diverse Broadway presence. For the first time in a long while, black talent is being represented both on stage and behind the scenes. In fact, this is the year that Eclipsed made history as the first ever Broadway show, exclusively written by, directed by, and starring black women. Now that’s something worth talking about.

So as we continue to celebrate and discuss this new Black Theater Movement, let’s also remember the talent who paved the way, including Lorraine Hansberry, August Wilson, Ruby Dee, and so many others. This is our time. —K.G.
Poet-in-Residence
by Dr. Gloria Joseph, is what I read at her love and legacy of Audre Lorde contribution to the new book about Audre, The Wind Is Spirit: The Life, daughter, Angela Davis, and I spoke at her funeral in 1992 in St. Croix. My and we hugged. And only then did the sisters around her relax. Audre's backlash. I said, "So what's new? Are we friends?" And she stood up to get messy down here," she said. "I don't want you to be involved in her towards me and I said, "Hey Audre!" but she didn't answer and kept we were in the lobby waiting. She walked with a posse of women around lesbian. We all were staying at a hotel, but the rooms weren't ready so the 1970s. I remember because it was the day after Audre came out [as a We a BaddDDD People, the second poetry collection by the prolific and wildly talented writer Sonia Sanchez published in 1973, is a favorite of mine. You can't beat the title because, well, it's true. We are. But mostly because her book effectively changed the way I understood and related to poetry, specifically when infused with the beauty, dexterity and life-giving properties of Black speech—a straightforward yet nuanced, often humorous, and dead-on way of calling it like it is. Sanchez is fluent in Black speech.

Widely anthologized, Sanchez is the author of eighteen poetry collections, seven plays, one short story collection, three children's books, and two spoken word recordings. She currently serves as a Schomburg Scholar-in-Residence and is working on a memoir.

Sanchez has deep roots at the Schomburg. One summer day in 1972, she was on her way to City College for a job interview, and noticed the 135th Street Branch Library near the corner of 135th Street and Lenox Avenue, now referred to as the Landmark Building of the Schomburg Center. "I stumbled upon the [library] and Mrs. Jean Blackwell-Hutson, then curator of the Schomburg collection, told me 'all these books are by and about black folks.' And I said with my 9 1/2-year-old fresh self that 'there must not be many books in there.'" But when she went inside, Sanchez discovered rows of books, paper collections, artwork, photographs, and other items by and about people of African descent.

I recently sat down with Sanchez to talk more about two of her most illustrious influences:

Steven Fullwood: What do you remember most about Mrs. Hutson? Sonia Sanchez: When I was on Gil Noble’s television show, like it, he asked me to talk about the people who influenced me. I told him Malcolm and Martin, the usual suspects. And Mrs. Hutson, curator at the Schomburg library. She introduced me to books by W.E.B. Dubois, Paul Robeson, etc. When I got home to Philadelphia and walked in the door, my phone was ringing. It was Mrs. Hutson, with tears in her throat. "No one has ever publicly praised me for what I do at the Schomburg," she said. We tend not to celebrate people until they are dead.

Steven Fullwood: Recently you participated in Schomburg’s Before 5 program, “The Life, Love and Legacy of Audre Lorde.” Talk about your connection to Lorde and her legacy.

Sonia Sanchez: We had a writer’s conference at Howard University in the 1970s. I remember because it was the day after Audre came out [as a lesbian]. We all were staying at a hotel, but the rooms weren’t ready so we were in the lobby waiting. She walked with a posse of women around her towards me and I said, “Hey Audre!” but she didn’t answer and kept walking. I went over to where they were sitting and we talked. “It’s going to get messy down here,” she said. “I don’t want you to be involved in the backlash.” I said, “So what’s new? Are we friends?” And she stood up and we hugged. And only then did the sisters around her relax. Audre’s daughter, Angela Davis, and I spoke at her funeral in 1972 in St. Croix. My contribution to the new book about Audre, The Wind Is Spirit: The Life, love and legacy of Audre Lorde by Dr. Gloria Joseph, is what I read at her funeral. I had not read it until very recently [at the program], and I broke down. I had not visited St. Croix since she died. What a loss, losing her at such an early age.
Digging Up the Past Honors the History of the Schomburg Center

Just before we blow out the last candle in our yearlong 90th anniversary celebration in May, we are thrilled to be able to present one last walk down memory lane with Digging Up the Past: A History of the Schomburg Center. This pop-up exhibition invites visitors to take a peek at the Library’s genesis and evolution.

The exhibition was organized into three sections: 1) The Founder - honoring the life and vision of Afro-Puerto Rican bibliophile, activist, and educator Arturo Schomburg; 2) The Inception - exploring the early story of the Schomburg center and the groundbreaking Division of Negro Literature, History and Prints at the New York Public Library’s 135th Street branch; and 3) The Evolution - chronicling the Center’s historic journey over nearly a century. The chronology is illustrated with 32 letters, photographs, documents, pamphlets, publications, flyers, material culture, and other objects—dating from 1874 to 2015. All of the items on display are gleaned from the Schomburg Center’s Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division; Photographs and Prints Division; Art and Artifacts Division; and Jean Blackwell Hutson Research and Reference Division.

In 1986, the Schomburg Center took on the task of writing the history of the institution. This resulted in Remaking the Past to Make the Future, a commemorative publication celebrating the Library’s 65th anniversary and chronicling the history of the Center and its collections. Thirty years later, this exhibition brings pivotal moments in this timeline to life and extends the project to the present day. Digging Up the Past serves as a primer that encourages the community not only to dig deeper into the history housed at the Schomburg Center, but also to learn about the origins and progression of the Center itself.

The exhibition was organized into three sections: 1) The Founder - honoring the life and vision of Afro-Puerto Rican bibliophile, activist, and educator Arturo Schomburg; 2) The Inception - exploring the early story of the Schomburg center and the groundbreaking Division of Negro Literature, History and Prints at the New York Public Library’s 135th Street branch; and 3) The Evolution - chronicling the Center’s historic journey over nearly a century. The chronology is illustrated with 32 letters, photographs, documents, pamphlets, publications, flyers, material culture, and other objects—dating from 1874 to 2015. All of the items on display are gleaned from the Schomburg Center’s Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division; Photographs and Prints Division; Art and Artifacts Division; and Jean Blackwell Hutson Research and Reference Division.

In 1986, the Schomburg Center took on the task of writing the history of the institution. This resulted in Remaking the Past to Make the Future, a commemorative publication celebrating the Library’s 65th anniversary and chronicling the history of the Center and its collections. Thirty years later, this exhibition brings pivotal moments in this timeline to life and extends the project to the present day. Digging Up the Past serves as a primer that encourages the community not only to dig deeper into the history housed at the Schomburg Center, but also to learn about the origins and progression of the Center itself.

The Schomburg Partners with Google Cultural Institute on a Groundbreaking Two-Part Exhibit Celebrating 50 Years of the Black Power Movement

The Black Power movement turned fifty this year. Two new digital exhibitions, Black Power: The Revolution, Education, Arts, and Aesthetics of the Black Power Movement, explore the multifaceted and ideologically diverse movement that deeply shaped black consciousness and identity and left an immense legacy that continues to inform the contemporary American landscape.

The two exhibitions, part of our Black History Month initiatives, were a first-time collaboration between the Schomburg Center and Google Cultural Institute, whose mission is to “bring together millions of artifacts from multiple partners, with the stories that bring them to life, in a virtual museum.” Thanks to Google’s massive international reach, museums and other institutions can present their "treasures or hidden gems" to a wide audience.

As the curator of the Black Power exhibition, I enjoyed the experience. For the past year, I have been working on a “physical” exhibition on the Black Power movement. It will open at the Schomburg Center in September. The catalog, published by The New Press, will be released in August. Together, the digital and onsite exhibitions and the book present photographs, essays, testimonies, flyers, pamphlets, periodicals, manuscripts, posters, and audiovisual segments to help contextualize and interpret this creative and revolutionary youth-led movement.

Black Power was not confined to the United States, nor was it “black” only. Latino, American Indian, Asian-American and white progressives were an integral part of the movement, which was also a global phenomenon. Reaching well beyond America’s borders, it captured the imagination of anticolonial and other freedom struggles in the world and was also influenced by them. From Great Britain to Israel, from India to New Zealand, marginalized populations rallied around slogans fashioned after “Black Power,” and organizations modeled or named after the Black Panther Party. The Black Power cultural nationalism of natural hair and African-inspired fashion; the political activists’ raised fists and berets; and the concept that black is beautiful resonated throughout the country and beyond. Yet, Black Power is one of the least understood movements in the country, its achievements largely dismissed or minimized. Perceived mostly as a violent episode that followed the nonviolent civil rights movement, Black Power has been eclipsed in the general public’s memory by the former, even though it has shaped issues of identity, politics, criminal justice, culture, art, and education for the past half century. And, not to be forgotten, following in the Black Power’s footsteps, American Indian, Asian-American, Latino, LGBT, and women groups affirmed themselves and demanded change.

To understand African-American history, and ultimately American society today, it is imperative to understand the depth and breadth, the achievements and failures, of the Black Power Movement.

For more information on our two digital exhibitions, visit nypl.org/digitalschomburg.
A young performer takes center stage in the Eagle Academy for the Young Men of Newark production of The Lyin’ King.

Dr. Brittney Cooper takes a stand against respectability politics in our “Stage for Debate” program.

Filmmaker Haile Gerima presents his acclaimed drama, Ashes and Embers, to the Schomburg audience.

Veteran actor Clarke Peters discusses his knockout role in the Lincoln Center Theater’s The Royale.

Actress Jurnee Smollett at our premiere of WGN America’s Underground series.

EXHIBITIONS
Digging Up the Past: A History of the Schomburg Center
Bringing our popular onsite tribute to the Center and founder Arturo Schomburg to broader audiences, this webpage underscores the significance of the institution’s legacy.
SchomburgCenter.org

PUBLIC PROGRAMS
Between the Lines: Antonio “L.A.” Reid
Megaproducer L.A. Reid graced the Schomburg stage last season, and nearly 8,000 online viewers watched him talk with Jason King (New York University) about his inspirational career and his new book, Sing to Me.
Livestream.com/schomburgcenter

BLOGS
African Americans on Broadway Then and Now
A.J. Muhammad, Librarian in our Jean Blackwell Hutton Research and Reference Division, reflects on the impact African Americans have made and continue to make on stage.
SchomburgCenter.org

PODCASTS
Schomburg Mixtape
As part of winning the National Medal, the Institute of Museum and Library Services awarded us with a unique opportunity to record conversations with the Schomburg’s extended family—including artists, activists, and educators—with StoryCorps.
Soundcloud.com/SchomburgLive (Playlist: Schomburg Mixtape)

CONVERSATIONS IN BLACK FREEDOM STUDIES’ WEBSITE
Our standout Education series is making its digital mark with a dazzling website that features a video archive of all past programs, calendar listings, and more.
Blackfreedomstudies.org

—C.F.

DIGITAL SCHOMBURG

The Schomburg is now officially a viral sensation. We’ve not only provided unique content for our main site (schomburgcenter.org), but we’ve also uploaded tons of digital gems on our extended platforms—which include SoundCloud, YouTube, and Livestream. Here are some of our highlights:

AFRICANA HERITAGE / Volume 16, No. 3, 2016 / Where Every Month Is Black History Month

AFRICANA HERITAGE / Volume 16, No. 3, 2016 / Where Every Month Is Black History Month

AROUND THE SCHOMBURG

To watch some of the programs highlighted here, please visit youtube.com/TheSchomburgCenter

MSNBC correspondent Joy Reid explores The Black Presidency with author Michael Eric Dyson.

A young performer takes center stage in the Eagle Academy for the Young Men of Newark production of The Lyin’ King.

Dr. Brittany Cooper takes a stand against respectability politics in our “Stage for Debate” program.

Actress Jurnee Smollett at our premiere of WGN America’s Underground series.
Championing the Cause

Part two of our interview with Dean Schomburg, one of Arturo Schomburg’s three grandsons. Please refer to the winter 2016 issue of the Africana Heritage for part one of the interview.

Dean Schomburg who has remained a Schomburg Society member since 1975. He is a retired radio newscaster, announcer, and distinguished writer. He earned his Master’s Degree in Africana Studies from Fordham University and a Master’s Degree in Communication from Rutgers University.

What are your thoughts about what Arturo Schomburg was able to accomplish in his lifetime?

I am stunned at the amount of time, energy, and passion that was required of my grandfather to undertake his lifelong journey. It was because of the real truth he blazed that led me to pursue my undergraduate degree in Black Studies, and I feel humbled by the responsibilty that now rests with me to carry on his legacy and groundbreaking ideals. One particular instance that comes to mind is his 1951 call for educational institutions to offer black studies programs to bring to college students a much-needed level of awareness and concern about the need for cultural diversity and understanding. It was 50 years later that such programs had begun to be a part of the curriculums at progressive institutions such as San Francisco State University (the origin of the Black Power Movement of the early 1960s).

What would you like to pass on to future generations about Arturo Schomburg and the Center?

For future generations to stand proudly knowing that there lived a man whose entire life was devoted to securing their understanding of their importance and contributions to civil society. His legacy is secured by the existence of the Schomburg Center, so that all that is required of us is to accept and rely upon Arturo Schomburg’s vision of a world where people of color are able to rise to their heights without the encumbrances of racism that lead us away from the path upon which we are intended to travel. Arturo’s message is loud and clear, and will reverberate to future generations in ever greater measures as the interconnectivity of societies continues to reach proportions that he could not have envisioned, but that will assure his world will always shine as a beacon for those who seek fulfillment without artificial and needless racial constructs and constraints.

If not us, then who?
Mahen Bonetti, Founder and Executive Director of the African Film Festival, flashes a smile after our screening of Afripedia.