Celebrating 90 Years of Schomburg Collections

5 Questions With...
Our New Director of Collections

The Lapidus Center's First Anniversary

Conversations in Black Freedom Studies: Putting Women Back in the Narrative
Toni Morrison once said in this building that libraries are pillars of democracy. Maya Angelou sat on the Langston Hughes stage of the Schomburg and called them rainbows in the clouds.

Our current and past Scholars-in-Residence share how their experiences have motivated them in the classroom, throughout their careers, and in life.

Myra Young Armstead
Professor, Department of History, Bard College
Project: Progressive Public History in Harlem
[National Endowment for the Humanities/Ford Foundation Fellow, 2014–2015]
“To have sustained access to the resources of the Schomburg holdings—as well as engaging with the fellows—was a researcher’s dream. The Center gave me one of the most productive periods of my professional career.”

Raphael Dalleo
Associate Professor, Department of English, Florida Atlantic University
“The semester I spent at the Schomburg Center was one of the most productive periods of my career. The last aspect of the fellowship was the seminars with other scholars-in-residence, from whom I was able to receive some of the most helpful feedback I have ever gotten on my writing.”

Martha Elizabeth Hodes
Assistant Professor, Department of History, New York University
Project: Place and Race, Borders and Identities: Black and White Migrations in the Civil War Era
(Enn Diamond Foundation Fellow, 1998–1999)
“All these years later, I continue to recall my fellowship at the Schomburg Center with tremendous warmth. I was able to research, write, exchange ideas, share drafts, attend seminars, find new friends in the other fellows and important allies in the scholarship’s leadership and staff an atmosphere of electric intellectual exchange, productivity, rigor, and great generosity.”

Jeffrey R. Kerr-Ritchie
Associate Professor, Department of History, State University of New York at Binghamton
Project: The Cultural Politics of Slave Emancipation in the British West Indies and the United States, 1831–1888
[National Endowment for the Humanities Fellow, 2002–2003]
“Almost daily, the Schomburg archive served up a veritable feast of expected and unexpected dedications to the scholar’s appetite. Indeed, the success of my book project can be traced directly to the intensity of scholarly and human encounters at 135th and M X Blvd. Work out!”

Rev. E. Shockley
Assistant Professor, Department of English, Rutgers University, New Brunswick
[National Endowment for the Humanities Fellow, 2007–2008]
“I can’t overstate the impact of the Schomburg’s scholars-in-residence fellowship on my research. The librarians and archivists introduced me to resources I might otherwise not have discovered, and helped me access materials that proved vital to my work. Equally important was the interdisciplinary intellectual community I found among the scholars with whom I was in residence.”

Rafia Zafar
Professor, English, Washington University, St. Louis
Project: Recipes for Repose
[National Endowment for the Humanities/Ford Foundation Fellow, 2014–2015]
“The NEH Scholar in Residence was one of the absolute peaks of my entire academic career!”

Nicole Wright
Assistant Professor, Department of English, University of Colorado at Boulder
Project: Thin and Justice for Fury: Race, Emotion, and Legal Agency in Prolific Fiction
[Ernst Diamond Center Fellow, 2015–2016]
“At the Schomburg Center, we scholars-in-residence have such a gift—and a considerable responsibility, too. I keep thinking of the early black writers and activists (and actual and fictional) whom I study, who had to gain their skills by stealth. They would have thought themselves in heaven to have access to one of the foremost libraries in the world.”

I was 1989 when I boarded what would become my last flight out of Nigeria for years. Coming to America was such a culture shock! Harlem was so fast-paced. The vision I had of a road paved in gold quickly faded from my mind as reality set in. All around me were abandoned buildings and the crack epidemic was in full swing. I went from being in the upper middle class in Nigeria—having a car, going to private school, living in a house and taking swimming lessons—to living in the projects for the first few months in the U.S. It wasn’t easy for my immigrant mom raising two kids, but it taught us resilience and gave us the ambition to succeed. The Schomburg also became the perfect hiding place for me to get lost in.

I was able to do wonderful research throughout high school and college at the Schomburg Center. The Center truly gave me the tools to excel.

Libraries played such a significant role in my life growing up, and that has come full circle for me as the Special Events Manager at the Schomburg Center. The Schomburg has made me who I am today, and I continue to learn so much more about my own culture and the global black experience.
1. What was it like at the Schomburg 38 years ago?
Back in November 1977, the Schomburg was an aged and interesting building whose innards were in various states of decay—peeling paint and plaster, old wooden window frames, etc. Nevertheless, beautiful bookcases with glass doors lined the main reading room, with contents secured by a series of skeleton-type keys. There was a custodian’s apartment on the third floor. But the sunlight pouring into the Dewey Decimal 800 room, along with the hissing, spitting radiators that forced windows to be kept open, wasn’t good for the books. We were thankful to see the opening of the new building, with often just a flashlight to guide us inside. The building was vacated in 1980 and there is an aged and interesting building whose modern counterpart is on East 116th Street in Harlem. Working in the then closed Landmark Residence on the top floor, I can’t describe our collection as a treasure hunt! We discovered letters written by artist Aaron Douglas, materials relating to writer and physician Rudolph Fisher and family, turn-of-the-century photos of Caribbean New Yorkers, James Van Der Zee photos, a Pullman porter uniform, an unpublished manuscript of a fictional work by NAACP chief executive Walter White, and much more.

2. Did you know that you always wanted to work at a library?
Yes. As a child I loved books. Some of my fondest childhood memories involved the library. One of my favorite things to do was visit the main branch of the Barbados Public Library in my native country. It was a place of reverence and even then I felt privileged to have such access. I dreamed of working in a library. Three years after earning my undergraduate degree, I began earning my Master’s degree in Library Science.

3. What drew you to photography?
Early on at the Schomburg, I discovered that a photograph could also be a work of art, and photography was something way beyond what I came from an instamatic camera. They’re also documents. Artists such as Roy DeCarava showed me the artistic possibilities of photography. By working with the medium I learned so much more about African history and culture.

4. What is your fondest memory of the Schomburg Center?
Four of us from the Manuscripts Division were assigned to work on a new collection for which we had to open several trunks donated by the 409 Edgecombe Tenants Association in Harlem. Working in the then closed Landmark building, with often just a flashlight to guide us (the building was vacated in 1980 and there was no electricity except for the custodian’s residence on the top floor), I can’t describe our excitement as we waited with baited breath to discover the contents of each trunk. It was like a treasure hunt! We discovered letters written by artist Aaron Douglas, materials relating to writer and physician Rudolph Fisher and family, turn-of-the-century photos of Caribbean New Yorkers, James Van Der Zee photos, a Pullman porter uniform, an unpublished manuscript of a fictional work by NAACP chief executive Walter White, and much more.

5. How does your passion for collecting tie in to Arturo Schomburg’s mission?
As a teenager, my family parted with precious family photographs. They were given as keepsakes to relatives as we left to begin new lives in the United States. Years later, when I could no longer see the likeness of my grandparents, I realized the importance of keeping and preserving our history—just like Arturo Schomburg. As a curator, I am always on a quest to identify and acquire materials on the global black experience in order to continue to build and expand collection holdings. I continue to seek out both materials documenting past history and those that capture and address contemporary issues and developments. This requires working not only with photographers and dealers around the world, but also with like-minded donors who have a commitment to the preservation of African history and culture.

O n the first Thursday of each month, the Schomburg Center hosts a series of roundtable conversations curated by Professors Jeanne Theoharis (Brooklyn College/CUNY) and Kamoli Woodard (Sarah Lawrence College) that challenges civil rights historiography and explores the black freedom struggle and its various movements toward liberation. Last November’s penultimate discussion, “Protest, Women, and Performance,” explored the role black women have played in the Civil Rights Movement. Panelist Shetia Randolph, Tanisha Ford, and Ruth Feldstein examined the use of style, music and performance as forms of resistance to oppression. Ford discussed how the very act of getting dressed is a powerful tool of resistance. From the afro to the bantu knot, women have been using fashion and adornment as rebukes of resistance. During the apartheid struggle in South Africa, women used stiletto heels as weapons to fight against police brutality. Similarly, black American women during the Civil Rights Movement explicitly used performance to form political and cultural interventions that challenged patriarchal norms, and racial politics of respectability, female agency and civil rights.

Despite black women’s achievements, historical narratives often fail to address their role in raising black political consciousness. The male-dominated political and intellectual sphere often forces women like Fannie Lou Hammmer, Diane Nash, and Flo Kennedy out of historical memory. Even during today’s Black Lives Matter Movement, women continue to be catalysts of change at home and abroad.

4TH ANNUAL BLACK COMIC BOOK FESTIVAL Saturday, January 16 from 10am to 7pm The Schomburg Center’s 4th Annual Black Comic Book Festival celebrates the rich tradition of black comic in a full-day event featuring panel discussions, film screenings, hands-on workshops and exhibit tables with premiere black comic artists from across the country. Don’t miss this popular annual event and check out the mind-blowing Afterlautsium art and design exhibition, Unveiling Visions: The Alchemy of the Black Imagination curated by John Jennings and Komozi Woodard. The Schomburg Center’s Black Comic Book Festival is presented by Derride Hallman (Schomburg Education and The Junior Scholars Program) in collaboration with Jerry Craft (Mama’s Boy) and John Jennings (SUNY Buffalo/Black Kirby).

Fun for all ages: Register at schomburgcenter.eventbrite.com #blackcomicbookfestival All exhibitors are by invitation only. Please contact schomburged@nypl.org for more information.
Celebrating 90 Years of Schomburg Collections

The Schomburg Center celebrates the 75th anniversary of its renowned American Negro Theatre (ANT)

Known to the locals as “The Harlem Library Little Theater,” the ANT was founded in 1940 as a community space for theatrical productions that aimed to elevate black life. This exhibition is a comprehensive look at the entirety of the Schomburg Collections and highlights the ANT’s stage productions from 1940 through 1949 with photographs, posters, playbills, and clippings. Images include scenes from successful productions such as Anna Lucasta, written by Langston Hughes, and Gentleman’s Agreement by the American Negro Theatre (ANT) production. The exhibition features a documentary that takes audiences to Sierra Leone, through the story of the famous ship, “Glory.” The exhibition features interviews with Anthony Kaye, Professor of History at Pennsylvania State University, and author Thulani Davis, Associate Professor of Afro-American Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Though 2015, the Lapidus Center also welcomed its first fellows, Dr. Nathalie Joy, Professor of History at Wellesley College, and Dr. Nicole Wright, who benefited from six months of research in the collections as they worked on their first books. More about the Lapidus Center, upcoming events, and to watch our programs, visit us at lapiduscenter.org.

Select items from the exhibition:
- A 1950s hand-correction of Richard Wright’s Native Son
- Malcolm X’s travel diaries, 1964
- “John Brown,” an address delivered by Frederick Douglass at Harpers Ferry and edited in Douglas’ own hand, 1881
- Telegrams from Langston Hughes and Tennessee Williams to Lorraine Hansberry congratulating her on the opening night of A Raisin in the Sun, 1959
- Maya Angelou’s handwritten draft of I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings, 1965
- John Coltrane’s “Lover’s” sheet music, 1950s
- Zora Neale Hurston’s Their Eyes Were Watching God, 1937
- Arthur A. Schomburg’s “The Negro Digs Up His Past,” in Alain Locke’s The New Negro, signed to Schomburg by Alain Locke, Countee Cullen, Jesse Redmon Fauset, W.E.B. Du Bois

What’s New at the Schomburg Gift Shop

Visit the Schomburg Gift Shop and pick up one-of-a-kind necklaces and cuff links or one of the popular brooches by Coreen Simpson, creator of the Cameo collection. We also have signed copies of books by Ta-Nehisi Coates, Arthur Brownwe, and Aeri Berman—who each visited the Schomburg Center last season—and much more. Plus, check out the new DVD from Stuart Math, Shaker Heights: The Struggle for Integration and cool displays of our recent exhibitions, Black Suburbia: From Levittown to Ferguson and Unveiling Visions: The Alchemy of the Black Imagination.

And don’t forget to bring the Schomburg with you and purchase our very Black and Black Lives Matter merchandise, including T-shirts, journals, planners, and buttons.

Remember: members receive 20% off regular-price items. Contact Schomburg and The Gift Shop at 212-491-2206 for more information.

By Alicia Perez, Communications Pre-Professional
DIGITAL SCHOMBURG

Our conversation with bestselling author Ta-Nehisi Coates isn’t the only thing buzzing on our digital platforms with almost 80,000 pageviews (and counting). We’ve shared tons of content over the past season that has grabbed the attention of not only our myriad social media followers, but media like Colorlines, The Nation, and OkayPlayer. Check out some of our most popular posts:

**EXHIBITIONS**
- Black Suburbia: From Levittown to Ferguson
- Unveiling Visions: The Alchemy of the Black Imagination

The webpages for our recent exhibitions featured blogs, events, videos and more related content that kept the conversation going. SchomburgCenter.org

**EVENTS**
- Between the Lines: Timbaland
  The record producer stopped by the Schomburg to discuss his music, TV ventures, and being a dad.
  livestream.com/schomburgcenter

**VIDEOS**
- The Schomburg Celebrates 90 Years
  Notables like Hollywood icon Harry Belafonte and scholar Dr. Kwame Anthony Appiah share what the Schomburg means to them.
  youtube.com/user/TheSchomburgCenter

**BLOGS**
- Ta-Nehisi Coates’s Reading List
  Schomburg Associate Chief Librarian Maira Liriano features all the books that inspired Ta-Nehisi Coates, as referenced from our conversation with the author last fall.
  SchomburgCenter.org

**PODCASTS**
- American Negro Theatre’s New World A-Coming
  Take a walk down memory lane by listening to the raw audio of the American Negro Theatre’s groundbreaking radio show.
  soundcloud.com/schomburglive

**THE LAPIDUS CENTER’S NEW WEBSITE**

Visit lapiduscenter.org to stay up-to-date on events, podcasts, online exhibitions and more.

**DIGITAL SCHOMBURG**

By Candice Frederick
Communications Manager

Around the Schomburg

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

Sound Artist Val Jeanty provides the beats at our Fall Open House.

New archivists, Tiana Tialep and Alexsandra Mitchell, showcase our flash exhibit for last fall’s program, First Fridays: Prince vs. Michael.

Students gear up for our new season of the Junior Scholars Program.

SNL comedienne Sasheer Zamata cuts it up at our first ever Comedy Night at the Schomburg.

Afrocentric Director Khalil Gibran Muhammad celebrates our 90th anniversary gala with honorees Franklin Thomas, Darren Walker, Norman Lear, Elizabeth Alexander, and Mercer Cook, son of honoree Vernon Jordan, as well as New York Public Library President Anthony Marx.

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PUBLIC PROGRAMS

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

JANUARY

Thursday, January 21 at 6:30 PM
Films at the Schomburg: AFRIPEDIA
AFRIPEDIA is a docuseries highlighting art, film, photography, fashion, design, and music. A talkback will follow. This program is presented through an annual collaboration with the African Film Festival.

Friday, January 22 at 2:00 PM
Celebrating the Birth of El-Hajj Malik El Shabazz
In collaboration with the Malcolm X Museum.

Monday, January 25 and Friday, February 6 at 7:00 PM
The Lapidus Center Presents: Reclaiming Our Ancestors

March

Wednesday, March 16 at 6:30 PM
The Lapidus Center Presents: Reclaiming Our Ancestors

Thursday, March 17 at 6:30 PM
Schomburg on Location: John Oliver Killens Celebration
Author John Oliver Killens wrote bold works including Yo-Hungoolah and And Then We Heard the Thunder. He was one of the most influential African American literary activists from the 1940s to the 1960s.

Wednesday, March 23 at 7:00 PM
Before 5: Harlem on My Plate

March

MacBene

April

Tuesday, April 2 at 7:00 PM
Lively and Lively of Audre Lorde

Wednesday, April 3 at 6:30 PM
Films at the Schomburg: Jackie Robinson
Jackie Robinson tells the story of an icon whose battle for first-class citizenship for all African Americans transcends his athletic achievements. A talkback with director Ken Burns will follow.

Monday, April 2 at 7:00 PM
Nicky Finney: The Battle for and of the Black Face Key
Finney will read the work in conversation with artist Kevin Young.

Monday, April 11 at 7:00 PM
Assured Foundation

Schomburg Society News

Championing the Cause

Dean Schomburg shares why he has remained a Schomburg Society member since 1975. Mr. Schomburg is one of Arturo Schomburg’s three grandchildren, a retired radio newscaster, announcer, and distinguished writer. He earned his Bachelor’s degree in African Studies from Fordham University and a Master’s degree in Communication from Rutgers University. Stay tuned for the second conversation from the Ryder interview in the next issue.

What made you first give to the Schomburg?
When I came of age and realized what the Schomburg Center was all about, I felt very young to be a part of the legacy that my grandfather had left for all people who understood and embraced his passion for revealing the truth about contributions made by people of color. I felt it was my duty to honor his life’s work in any way I could, so it was a natural progression for me to join the Schomburg Society and make a financial commitment to advance his work.

What do you enjoy most about being a member?
My membership is an important link to the current state of affairs among black and brown America, and allows all of us the opportunity to reflect on the importance of our lives and our creation of the world as we know it. I am extremely proud to be able to say that the Center is, in my estimation, the best institution of its kind that speaks to, for, and about the black experience.

What do you tell others about the Schomburg Center?
Quite often I am asked about Arturo’s Puerto Rican roots and the origin of the Schomburg name. I would say I do a fair amount of cheerleading on behalf of the Center. It is rare for me to not come across a person in my travels who is not aware of “The Schomburg.” For those whom I come across who aren’t, I get an enormous amount of pleasure in explaining what the Center is all about. I am extremely proud to be able to say that the Center is, in my estimation, the best institution of its kind that speaks to, for, and about the black experience.

What is your most memorable event so far?
Perhaps the most memorable event for me was in the summer of 1980, when the Center was officially installed in the current building. That day was very special because it was the culmination of a long effort by then director Jean Blackwell Hurson to properly procure and present the Center’s unique collection of art, artifacts, and items. She always made a special effort to include family members in those landmark events and I very much enjoyed being in the presence of my kith and kin.

What did you tell others about the Schomburg Center?
For tickets, call 888-718-4253 or visit schomburgcenter.org/calendar and up-to-date program information, please visit schomburgcenter.org/calendar.

Questions about your membership?
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Around the Schomburg

Bestselling author Ta-Nehisi Coates captivates the audience at our book discussion for *Between the World and Me.*