1. NAME OF PROPERTY

Historic Name: Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture

Other Name/Site Number:

Designated a National Historic Landmark by the Secretary of the Interior December 23, 2016

2. LOCATION

Street & Number: 515 Lenox Avenue (also includes 103 West 135th Street) Not for publication:__

City/Town: New York Vicinity:__

State: NY County: New York Code: 061 Zip Code: 10037

3. CLASSIFICATION

Ownership of Property

Private:
Public-Local: X
Public-State:
Public-Federal:

Category of Property

Building(s): X
District:
Site:
Structure:
Object:

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing		**Noncontributing**	
buildings	3	buildings	0
sites	0	sites	0
structures	0	structures	0
objects	0	objects	0
Total	3	Total	0

Number of Contributing Resources Previously Listed in the National Register: 1

Name of Related Multiple Property Listing:

4. STATE/FEDERAL AGENCY CERTIFICATION

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this ____ nomination ____ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property ____ meets ____ does not meet the National Register Criteria.

Signature of Certifying Official Date

State or Federal Agency and Bureau

In my opinion, the property ____ meets ____ does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of Commenting or Other Official Date

State or Federal Agency and Bureau

5. NATIONAL PARK SERVICE CERTIFICATION

I hereby certify that this property is:
___ Entered in the National Register
___ Determined eligible for the National Register
___ Determined not eligible for the National Register
___ Removed from the National Register
___ Other (explain): _____

Signature of Keeper Date of Action

6. FUNCTION OR USE

Historic: Education Sub: Library

Current: Education Sub: Library

7. DESCRIPTION

ARCHITECTURAL CLASSIFICATION: Neo-Classical, African Modern[1]

Materials:
Foundation: Stone, Concrete
Walls: Stone (Limestone), Brick, Glass
Roof: Clay Tile, Asphalt
Other: Glass, Steel

[1] Few architectural historians have written about African-inspired contemporary architecture, and in addition, there are few examples in the United States. Schomburg presents a unique example, and so the style is classified similarly to Native American Contemporary (or Modern) architecture. For example, see: Carol Herselle Krinsky. *Contemporary Native American Architecture: Cultural Regeneration and Creativity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

Summary

The Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture (Schomburg Center) in Harlem, New York City developed from a humble branch library into an internationally-recognized Africana institution. The Schomburg Center is nationally significant under NHL Criterion 3 as the best location to represent the idea of the African Diaspora, a revolutionizing model for studying the history and culture of people of African descent that used a global, transnational perspective.[2] The idea and the person who promoted it, Arthur (Arturo) Alfonso Schomburg (1874–1938), reflect the multicultural experience of America and the ideals that all Americans should have intellectual freedom and social equality. The Schomburg Center amassed one of the greatest collections for Africana scholarship and its sources have expanded the study of African history and culture around the world and enriched the broader narrative of American history and Western Civilization.

The Schomburg Center is also nationally significant under NHL Criterion 2 as the only remaining property associated with Arthur Schomburg, an Afro-Latino immigrant and self-taught bibliophile who promoted the idea of the African Diaspora.

Finally, the Schomburg Center is nationally significant under Criterion 1 for its important role during the era of Jim Crow as a model for integrated libraries; during the Harlem Renaissance as the "place to go" for artists, authors, actors and activists; and during the "long Civil Rights Movement" as a spearhead for research on African Diaspora history and culture. The full complex (completed in 1991) realized Schomburg's vision for a dedicated space for his collection, thus continuing functions and an intellectual mission established during the Harlem Renaissance. Therefore, the entire complex is included in this nomination and is eligible for NHL consideration under Exception 8.

Describe Present and Historic Physical Appearance

Sitting at the intersection of 135th Street and Lenox Avenue (Malcom X Blvd) in the center of Harlem, the Schomburg Center complex consists of three components. The first component is the 1905 135th Street branch library constructed by McKim, Mead, and White. The second component is the 1980 research and exhibit facility fronting Lenox Avenue constructed in a modernist/African Revival style by J. Max Bond Jr. The third component is the 1991 connector comprising an auditorium and multi-functional space, all encircling a sunken courtyard on 135th Street. The three joined buildings express the development of the institution and the growth of its services to the immediate and extended community. Together, they fulfill the vision of Arturo Schomburg. (Figures 1 and 2)

Schomburg Complex Setting

The Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture sits in the middle of Harlem, a nationally-significant community best known for its association with the "Harlem Renaissance." It survives as an integral intellectual and cultural institution of this movement, facilitating artists and providing a space for performances and exhibitions. At first a community of predominately Jewish immigrants, Harlem became a destination for people of African descent who migrated from the south and immigrated from the West Indies and Africa. By the 1920s, the neighborhood was associated with a thriving African-American literary, intellectual, and artistic community broadly referred to as the "Harlem Renaissance."

[2] Many African-American historians looked beyond the United States border, but through his collection and curation, which set the foundation for the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Schomburg had a key role in promoting the idea, which only recently has been termed "African Diaspora." Robin D. G. Kelley, "'But a Local Phase of a World Problem': Black History's Global Vision, 1883-1950," *Journal of American History* (86, 3): 1045-1077; Colin A. Palmer, "Defining and Studying the Modern African Diaspora," *Journal of Negro History* 85, 1/2 (Winter-Spring 2000): 27-32.

The complex sits at the corner of 135th Street and Lenox Avenue/ Malcolm X Boulevard in Harlem. It maintains a prominent position, with Lenox Avenue serving as the symbolic "heart of Harlem," a phrase used by Langston Hughes to describe the busy thoroughfare.[3] The corner is also known as "speakers' corner," where activists including Marcus Garvey and Malcolm X spoke on a range of political and social issues, garnering attention from passers-by and often drawing large crowds. In the 1920s and 1930s, the 135th Street Branch served as an institutional anchor. Down the street stands the Harlem YMCA at 180 West 135th Street (NHL, 1976, aka Claude McKay Residence), which provided temporary housing for iconic poets, authors, artists, and musicians of the Harlem Renaissance, including Langston Hughes and Claude McKay. This setting creates a significant physical relationship and cultural geography for the Schomburg Center that continues. (Figure 3)

135th Street Branch (103 West 135th Street), aka Landmark Building

Exterior

The 135th Street branch library, constructed in 1905, is the oldest part of the Schomburg complex and briefly served as a lending library for the neighborhood until converted to a research facility. The 135th St Branch is a three story brick and stone building with a tripartite, limestone faced front façade. (Figure 4) The façade is a Classical Revival style characteristic of Beaux Arts architects McKim, Mead, and White, and it remains as it appeared when first constructed.[4] The first level is composed of rusticated limestone with five fenestrations: two windows on the left (west) half, a central window, and a window and main entrance on the right (east) half. Above the entrance is a three-light window that illuminates the vestibule. The entrance is approached by a short stoop with ornamented iron railings (intact) and was flanked by two Renaissance revival bronze lanterns (similar to the extant ones at the Chatham Square Branch), which remained intact into the 1970s, were removed, but are being restored. The first story is divided from the second by a wide band course ornamented with an alternating pattern of open books and festoons.[5]

The second and third stories consist of three bays broken by four pilasters that extend from the top of the band course to the bottom of the architrave. The outmost pilasters border the façade and are topped with a Corinthian capital. The two interior pilasters have simple, fluted capitals. A Palladian window is in the center of the composition. On the third floor, the Palladian window is capped by an arched fanlight covered by an ornamental iron grille. (Figure 5) On the third floor, four single-glaze fenestrations complete the symmetry of the arrangement. The front of the building is topped with a simple entablature including a frieze embellished with four disks above each pilaster. In the center, the engraved inscription "New York Public Library," frames a cartouche embellished with the seal of New York.[6] The building is completed by a copper overhanging cornice with simple modillions and coffers.

Interior

The 135th Street branch briefly followed the plan carried out in many Carnegie branch libraries used throughout New York City. The building originally provided space for the lending department and community functions. The original plan called for a dedicated adult and child lending libraries, reading rooms, a caretaker's

[3] Langston Hughes, "Juke Box Love Song," in Arnold Rampersad, ed., *The Poems: 1951-1967* (Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 2001),33.

[4] Much has been written about this firm. For a primer, see: Leland M. Roth, *McKim, Mead & White, Architects* (New York: Harper & Row, 1983).

[5] A nomination for local designation summarizes some of the same information: Rachel Carley, "Schomburg Collection for Research in Black Culture," Designation List 139 LP-1133 (New York City: Landmarks Preservation Commission, February 3, 1981), 3-5.

[6] Carley, "Schomburg Collection," 5.

apartment, and community space in the basement.[7] Branch libraries like 135th Street relate a common experience of many public, educational institutions in American cities. Constructed in a grand-sweeping philanthropic gesture, these buildings were nonetheless humble, frequently altered, and often under-maintained. They were not architecturally exceptional; yet the community and educational initiatives they facilitated were powerful. Since 1926 the building has existed to facilitate use of the Schomburg collection. The collection was housed there, with the original intent to attain a new independent building, an ambition finally realized in 1980.[8]

Carnegie branch libraries in Manhattan were adaptable, simple spaces to facilitate a myriad of functions, programs, and communities.[9] Like many others, the 135th Street Branch floors were open, broken by simple classical columns; walls were flat and unornamented; and decorative features were limited to simple crown moldings , baseboards, and casings. Lights, furniture, and shelving were interchanged frequently as changing use or replacement was necessary.

The branch library was accessed through a simple but formal vestibule that moved library patrons through the ceremonial entrance, demarcating the space as a place for learning and study separate from the street and neighborhood beyond the doors. (Figure 6) In the vestibule, the door is encased by simple marble pilasters and walls are lined with marble wainscoting. Marble stairs led to the interior vestibule door, which mirror the exterior and are surrounded by marble pilasters and carved word entablature with dentil cornice. The doorway is capped by a two-light transom. The interior side of the entrance is surrounded by wood pilasters and carved wood entablature with dentil cornice. The vestibule leads into the stairwell along the east wall, which contains the original staircase outfitted with bronze ornamented geometric-patterned baluster, wood hand railing, wood skirt board, and carved wood newel drops demarcating the stair turns. (Figure 7) Original stone treads display the well-worn path that adults and children took up and down the stairs as they traveled between reading, circulation, and community spaces.

The expansive, first-floor space was to the left of the stairwell. Originally, the first floor housed the adult circulation in the front and adult reference department in the rear with charging table in the middle. When it opened, the 135th Street Branch had nearly 10,000 volumes.[10] Today the first floor serves as the Schomburg Center exhibition hall, but maintains the original open floor plan as well as many finishes. (Figure 8) The second floor plan originally mirrored the first and housed the children's circulating and reading room.[11] Like many of the other Carnegie libraries, the children's reading room included a fireplace, which is still intact. Today it serves as offices and storage. (Figure 9) The third floor originally contained an adult periodical reading room.[12] This space later became the location of the Division for Negro Literature, History, and Prints. Today, the space serves as offices and storage.

The basement contained assembly space and a theatre, which helped affirm the site as an intellectual and cultural institution for the neighborhood. Unlike the other Manhattan Carnegie libraries in New York City, the

[7] It is unclear how long the caretakers (or janitor's) apartment was used. No images or description of it exist. Descriptions of the building's early use appear in: American Library Association, "Another Library and Assembly Room for Harlem, New York," *Library Journal* 30 (July 1905):411; Theodore Koch, *A Book of Carnegie Libraries* (New York City: H. W. Wilson Company, 1917), 60. No published floor plan of the 135th Street Branch exists, nor has one been found in the New York Public Library Archives, which holds the records for all of the branch libraries.

[8] New York Public Library, 135th Street Branch. Plan for establishing a Department of Negro History, Literature and Art in the 135th Street Branch of the New York Public Library, March 25, 1924. W. E. B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312). Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries.

[9] Theodore Koch, *A Book of Carnegie Libraries* (New York City: H. W. Wilson Company, 1917).

[10] American Library Association, "Another Library and Assembly Room for Harlem, New York," *Library Journal* 30 (July 1905): 411.

[11] American Library Association, "Another Library and Assembly Room for Harlem, New York," *Library Journal* 30 (July 1905): 411.

[12] American Library Association, "Another Library and Assembly Room for Harlem, New York," *Library Journal* 30 (July 1905): 411.

135th Street branch basement could be accessed through the west side via a ten foot easement.[13] The deed for the property stipulated that a strip of land ten feet wide remain on the side to be used as an entrance, and access remains today. This permitted easier entrance to the basement theater space, which would become a significant feature of the branch by the 1920s. In the 1920s, this space served as the stage for a prominent African American theatre troupe, the NAACP-affiliated Krigwa Players. Later, in the 1930s and 1940s, it housed the American Negro theatre, a WPA project. This theatre space still remains.[14]

Countee Cullen Branch Library (104 West 136th Street)

In 1941, the New York Public Library constructed a new branch library on 136th Street to replace the insufficient 1905 branch library. The new facility was twice the size of the previous branch library. Now the Countee Cullen Branch Library, the structure at 104 West 136th Street served as a temporary home for the Schomburg Collection. From 1942 until 1954, the third floor housed the Schomburg Collection and provided a reading room.[15] Not yet recognized for its significance, NYPL officials shuffled the collection from branch library (135th Street building) to branch library (136th Street building) until a dedicated space could be provided. However, the collection returned back to the 135th street building in 1954. No significant events for the institution occurred during its brief occupation at the site.

Today, the Cullen Branch Library is programmatically, administratively, and physically separate from the Schomburg Center for Research for Black Culture. A once shared stairwell with punctured doors through the rear party walls served as the only superficial physical connection. (Figure 2) Consequently, the NHL boundary does not include the Countee Cullen Branch Library.

515 Lenox Avenue/Malcolm X Boulevard, 1980 Addition

The 1980 addition has been heralded as the "fulfillment" of librarian "Ernestine Rose's prediction and Arthur Schomburg's dreams."[16] Providing more space and improved climate controls, staff began planning for the 1980 building in 1970. In 1973, the city purchased the site on Lenox Avenue and the following year demolished the building that previously occupied the lot. In 1977, with money provided through the Public Works Act of 1976, the groundbreaking finally occurred.

The addition was designed by Bond Ryder Associates (later Bond Ryder James, Architects).[17] J. Max Bond Jr. was considered the most influential African-American architect in New York City and was one of the few African-American architects of national prominence. He earned his degree from Harvard University in the 1950s at a time when few minorities served in the field and one advisor even encouraged him to abandon his academic training because of his race. Bond worked for a short time in Ghana (1964–1967), and his time there, along with extensive study of construction and design throughout Northern Africa, influenced his design choices for the Schomburg Center. After returning to New York City in 1968, Bond led the Architects Renewal Committee in Harlem before founding his firm in 1970.[18] Bond's work often intersected his passion for racial

[13] Most branch libraries in Manhattan were constructed mid-block, attached to neighboring structures, and constructed at the building line. Branch libraries in the other boroughs were often free-standing on corner lots. Mary B. Dierickx, *The Architecture of Literacy*: *the Carnegie Libraries of New York City (*New York: Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art and the New York City Dept. of General Services, 1996), 37.

[14] American Library Association, "Another Library and Assembly Room for Harlem, New York," *Library Journal* 30 (July 1905): 411.

[15] Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture. *Remaking the Past to Make the Future* (New York: The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundation, 1886, Reprinted 1991), 18-20.

[16] Stanton F. Biddle, "'A Partnership in Progress' the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture." *The Crisis* 85, 10 (December 1978): 337.

[17] David V. Erdman, ed. Bulletin of Research in the Humanities: Schomburg Center Issue 84, 2 (Summer 1981): 139.

[18] David W. Dunlap, "J. Max Bond Jr., Architect, Dies at 73," *New York Times,* February 19, 2009.

justice and civil rights with design.[19] His firm designed the Martin Luther King Jr. Center for Nonviolent Social Change and the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute in Alabama. Bond's career portfolio demonstrates his interest in expressing African culture and racial justice through design.

The Schomburg Center addition completed in 1980 is perhaps best described as "African Modern."[20] Few architectural examples exist in the United States that were influenced and inspired by traditional African forms and styles.[21] The African-inspired design is characteristic of Bond's work and a compliment to Schomburg's legacy. The structure embodies the same social, cultural, and historical emphasis that defined the Schomburg collection, translated those ideas into material form, and transposing them onto the building that housed it, unlike the 135th Street Branch. The 1980 addition, juxtaposed against the 135th Street Branch, present a composition that display the changing ideals of library design, the history of the Schomburg Collection, and the variety of design that makes up the Harlem landscape.

Exterior

The 1980 addition is a modern, four-story red brick building with distinctive geometric components, hard lines, and cantilevered wing. In style and form, it is distinct and unsympathetic to the 1905 135th Street Branch. As one contemporary Schomburg staff member noted, the new building served as an "interesting contrast" to the older 135th Street Branch, built by McKim, Mead, and White.[22] The contrast reminds visitors and onlookers that the new addition was designed by and for the Schomburg Center.

The building has a four-story tower on the corner of 135th Street and Malcolm X Blvd, and extends north. Along Malcolm X Blvd, the building maintains a flat plane parallel to the sidewalk with no setback. The east façade and lobby were renovated in 2007 to be more open and visible to street and foot traffic; instead of a wall of brick as originally built, a large three-story assemblage of glass-plate panels opens the first-floor gallery to the sidewalk.[23] (Figure 10) A new steel overhanging roof protrudes from the top of the first floor marking the entrance to the site. Rows of ribbon windows illuminate the second and third floor. Vertical rows of narrow windows in the fourth floor break up the façade otherwise dominated by long, horizontal features. The use of bold, horizontal ribbon windows, and the resulting appearance of red positive and reflective negative space, is indicative of modern architectural design.

The west side of the 1980 addition, facing the 135th Street Branch and the courtyard, has a complex façade of the tower, cantilevered wing on the third and fourth floor with a post, and two-story octagon containing the interior reading spaces. Compared to the flat plane along Lenox Ave, the interior side of the building exposes the variety of uses housed within the structure. Future renovations will expand this with a room enclosed in glass, continuing the visual effect of the exterior on Malcom X Blvd. (Figure 11)

Interior Plan

515 Lenox Ave is on a northeast-southwest axis oriented along Malcom X Blvd. On the south end of the structure is an anchoring four-story stairwell tower that dominates the approach to the Schomburg Center. To

[19] For Bond's reflection on democratic design, and specifically design input by poor, African Americans of Harlem during the 1960s, see: Priscilla Tucker, "Poor Peoples' Plan," *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 27, 5 (January 1969): 265-269.

[20] The closest comparable being Native American modern architecture, which combines modern construction with traditional Native American influences. Carol Herselle Krinsky, *Contemporary Native American Architecture: Cultural Regeneration and Creativity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996). The modern adaptations of these two architectural and cultural traditions have been sorely understudied by architectural historians.

[21] Perhaps another appropriate example would be the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture scheduled to open in 2016, designed by a team that included Bond until his death in 2009.

[22] David V. Erdman, ed., Bulletin of Research in the Humanities Schomburg Center Issue 84, 2 (Summer 1981): 140.

[23] Felicia R. Lee, "Harlem's Cultural Anchor in a Sea of Ideas," *New York Times*, May 11, 2007.

the west is an octagonal stack that reaches from basement to second floor. Commenting about the design Schomburg Center architect J. Max Bond, Jr. noted that "the first churches built by Afro-Americans for themselves were made up of two octagon buildings."[24] A small cantilevered wing extends out towards 135th Street on the third and fourth floor. A block makes up the remainder of the building, extending from basement to fourth floor along Malcolm X Blvd.

The main entrance to the Schomburg Center is on Malcolm X Blvd. Visitors enter through the Schomburg Lobby, named after Arthur Schomburg. To the south is the Latimer/Edison Gallery, named after inventors Lewis Howard Latimer and Thomas A. Edison. The gallery is housed in the octagon at the south end of the site and provides views into the reading room below. To the north of the site are administrative offices. The second floor houses the Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division. As in the ground and cellar levels, a reading room occupies the octagonal space at the south end. The reading room is paneled with sapele wood from Nigeria.[25] This space exhibits the Pietro Calvi marble and bronze bust of Ira Aldridge as Othello, acquired by Schomburg in 1936. Stacks of material and more offices are housed to the north. The third floor houses the Photographs and Prints Division, which includes a research room and more stacks. The fourth floor consists almost entirely of stacks for collection storage.

The Cellar (basement) level includes the Jean Blackwell Hutson General Research and Reference Division. The reading room, housed in the octagon space, contains four iconic 1934 murals by artist Aaron Douglas (1899-1979): *Song of the Towers* (north wall), *The Negro in an African Setting* (east wall), *An Idyll of the Deep South* (south wall), and *From Slavery through Reconstruction* (west wall). (Figures 12 to 14) Douglas, Harlem Renaissance painter whom Alain Locke called a "pioneering Africanist," was commissioned as part of the Public Works of Art Project (PWAP) to create a series of murals for the 135th Street Branch.[26] The works are now part of the Art and Artifacts Division on permanent display and depict themes of African heritage, but also embody a pioneering style that had a lasting impact on American art and culture. *Song of the Towers* depicts a figure fleeing from the hand of serfdom. According to scholars at the Schomburg Center, it symbolizes "the migration of African peoples from the rural South and the Caribbean to the urban industrial centers of the North just after World War I. Standing on the wheel of life in the center of the composition, a saxophonist expresses the creativity of the 1920s.[27] The murals are hung to reflect the orthogonal direction to which their title and content allude: *An Idyll of the Deep South* appears on the south wall, and *The Negro in an African Setting* is on the east wall, reflecting the eastwardly African continent. The murals are one of many public art pieces housed at the Schomburg Center.

Schomburg Center Connector, 1991

When the 1980 building was completed, the space between the new and old building served as an outdoor social space. It housed a sculpture garden and amphitheater for outdoor events. However, the Schomburg Center was expanded in 1991 formally connecting the two sites. The 1991 addition was completed in August 1991 by Bond Ryder James, Architects, with the design steered by John James, then principal at the firm. The two-story addition provided interpretive space in the lobby, performance space in the auditorium, and houses the scholar center in the cellar. Just as the 1980 addition, the 1991 expansion was heralded as another contributing element to the fulfillment of the Schomburg Center. The expansion allowed the Schomburg Center to engage more

[24] As cited in: Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture. *Remaking the Past to Make the Future* (New York: The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundation, 1886, Reprinted 1991), 28.

[25] David V. Erdman, ed., Bulletin of Research in the Humanities Schomburg Center Issue 84, 2 (Summer 1981): 140.

[26] Amy Kirschke, *Aaron Douglas: Art, Race, and the Harlem Renaissance* (Jackson, Miss.: University of Press of Mississippi, 1995).

[27] New York Public Library, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Art and Artifacts Division. "Aaron Douglas' Magisterial Aspects of Negro Life" *Treasures of the New York Public Library.* https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/242f84e0-c6f4-012f-6fee-58d385a7bc34?canvasIndex=0 Accessed February 22, 2013.

thoroughly in the arts, an aspect of the Black diaspora that Schomburg valued immensely. The staff explained that, with the ability to accommodate performing arts and expand access to its art collection, the Schomburg Center would be more equipped to carry on "Arthur Schomburg's proud legacy…."[28]

Description

The expansion provides intellectual and physical interconnectedness between the 135th Street Branch and the 1980 addition. It is constructed on an east-west axis between the other two structures, with the Langston Hughes Lobby in the center. The lobby floor contains a public art installation known as the *Cosmogram*, a memorial combining art and poetry. (Figure 15) The centerpiece is the terrazzo and brass mosaic *Rivers* by Houston Conwill. The piece is a geometric depiction of "songlines, texts, and literary signs paying ancestral tribute in the tradition of African ritual ground markings."[29] The piece reflects the diverse cultures and background represented in the Schomburg Collection and by Schomburg. The *Cosmogram* also is an homage to the legendary Langston Hughes, and reflects his poem "The Negro Speaks of River." Several verses are positioned symbolically at relevant geographical locations on the *Cosmogram*, and the final verse of the poem, "My soul has grown deep like the rivers," is imbedded in the center of the circle. Hughes's cremated remains are also buried beneath in a stainless steel vessel.[30] The lifelines in the *Cosmogram* mark the birthplaces of Schomburg and Hughes, and intersect at Harlem. On the north side of the building is the two-story Langston Hughes Auditorium. (Figure 16) The south elevation opens to the courtyard. The cellar level is home to the Scholars Center, composed of office and meeting space.

Schomburg Complex Integrity

The Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture is a unique complex that combines buildings from different periods and design vocabulary, yet reflects a continuity of use for nearly 90 years. The setting and location in Harlem resulted in the Schomburg Center as a nationally-significant intellectual institution that served as a locus from and around which the Harlem Renaissance formed. The combination of research, reading, and community spaces has remained a constant balance maintained in the design of the complex. In addition, the complex has continued to serve as a premier destination for research on the African Diaspora, and it was here that the intellectual conceptualization of the African Diaspora gained its most significant footing. Finally, the complex is the only remaining property associated with the nationally-significant Arthur Schomburg and the full complex conveys the intellectual and cultural feeling evoked by Schomburg's collecting and intellectual pursuits.

The neoclassical façade and modern African-inspired addition tell the story of the development of the Schomburg from a humble branch library to a world-renowned research facility. The two octagons on the exterior and the public art installations in the interior (Douglas murals and *Cosmogram*) are particularly striking contributing features. However, the site is not significant for its architecture. Rather, it is the continuity of use, the association, and the intellectual work that has occurred there that makes the Schomburg Center nationally significant.

Earlier preservation interest (propelled by a focus on McKim, Mead, and White) has already resulted in National Register designation of the 1905 building. The building was closed between 1980 and 1991 but was renovated in in 1984–1985 by Ryder James Partnership.[31] Today, the first floor maintains the open plan as an exhibit gallery, the stairwell and vestibule remain intact, windows have been restored, and original architectural

[28] Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture. *Remaking the Past to Make the Future*, 35.
[29] "Self Guided Tour," Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture.
[30] "Self Guided Tour," Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture.
[31] Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture. *Report on Activities from July 1984-June 1985* (New York: The New York Public Library Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations, 1986), 3.

features remain, including baseboards, columns, second-floor fireplace, and plaster walls. Significantly, the basement still serves the same historical function as a theatre and community space. Upgrades to the structure as it transitioned in use are typical: a modern HVAC system was installed to maintain safe storage of the collection and in the exhibition gallery, and exhibits are shielded from the window with an added partition. Office spaces on the second and third floor were outfitted with drop ceilings and modern lighting. One partition was added on the second floor, but otherwise no demolition has occurred, and any change is reversible. Otherwise, there were few defining features to preserve in this humble branch library and while filled with boxes instead of books, it would be recognizable to Arturo Schomburg. The 1980 building was renovated in 2007 by Dattner Architects to include a glass curtain façade.[32]

[32] Felicia R. Lee, "Harlem's Cultural Anchor in a Sea of Ideas," *New York Times*, May 11, 2007.

8. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:
Nationally: X Statewide:__ Locally:__

Applicable National Register Criteria: A X B__ C__ D__

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions): A__ B__ C__ D__ E__ F__ G__

NHL Criteria: 1, 2, and 3; Exception 8

NHL Theme(s):
I. Peopling Places
4. Community and Neighborhood
II. Creating Social Institutions and Movements
1. Clubs and Organizations
2. Reform Movements
III. Expressing Cultural Values
1. Educational and Intellectual Currents
IV. Shaping the Political Landscape
4. Political Ideas, Cultures, and Theories

Areas of Significance:
African American History
Education
Latino American History
Social History

Period(s) of Significance: 1926–1991

Significant Dates:
1919-1928 Harlem Renaissance
1921 Ernestine Rose hired, established reference collection,
1921 Library hosts first art exhibit
1925 Division of Negro Literature, History, and Prints established
926 Library establishes the Little Negro Theatre
1926 Arthur Schomburg sells collection to library
1932 Arthur Schomburg becomes curator
1938 Arthur Schomburg dies
1940 Renamed Schomburg Collection of Negro History and Literature
1972 Designated a NYPL Research Library
1980 Addition at 515 Lenox Avenue
1991 Expansion, joining original and new wing

Significant Person(s): Arthur (Arturo) Alfonso Schomburg (1874–1938)

Cultural Affiliation: African American, Latino American

Architect/Builder: McKim, Mead, and White; J. Max Bond Jr (Bond, Ryder Associates)

Historic Contexts:

XVII. Education
G. Adjunct Educational Institutions
1. Museums, Archives, and Botanical Gardens
2. Libraries
XXXIX. Intellectual Currents
C. Ideologies and Interpretation of the Branches of Knowledge (History, Philosophy of History, Political Philosophy, etc.)
XXXI. Social and Humanitarian Movements
M. Civil Rights Movements

State Significance of Property, and Justify Criteria, Criteria Considerations, and Areas and Periods of Significance Noted Above.

Summary Statement

The Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture (Schomburg Center) is a nationally-significant research facility and community center that has significantly shaped intellectual and cultural developments of the twentieth century, particularly the Harlem Renaissance and the modern intellectual concept of the African Diaspora. Its nomination fills programmatic gaps identified in the 2008 *African American NHL Assessment,* which called for the development of future themes and nomination efforts for sites commemorating African American institutional and intellectual history.[33] It is also the only site associated with Arthur (Arturo) Schomburg, who was included in the introduction to the American Latino Theme Study.[34]

The Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture began at a humble Carnegie branch library, grew into the "place to go" in Harlem in the 1920s, and blossomed into an internationally-recognized intellectual and cultural institution.[35] The Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture is nationally significant under **NHL Criterion 3** as the best location to represent the idea of the African Diaspora, as well as the ideals of intellectual freedom, social equality, and cultural identity embodied by that idea. The idea of the African Diaspora was a revolutionizing model for studying the history and culture of people of African descent that used a global, transnational perspective.[36] The idea and its most significant promotor, Arthur (Arturo) Alfonso Schomburg (1874– 1938), reflect the multicultural experience of America and the continued effort by all Americans to achieve equality. To facilitate research on the African Diaspora, the Schomburg Center built upon the pioneering collection of Arthur Schomburg to develop one of the greatest institutions for Africana scholarship, and its sources have expanded the study of African history and culture around the world and enriched the broader narrative of American history and Western Civilization.

The Schomburg Center also holds national significance under **NHL Criterion 2** for its association with Puerto Rican born Arthur Schomburg, who developed and promoted the revolutionizing idea of the African Diaspora, and whose collection served as the foundation for the Schomburg Center.[37]

Finally, the Schomburg Center is nationally significant under **NHL Criterion 1** for its important role during the era of Jim Crow as a model for integrated libraries; during the Harlem Renaissance as the "place to go" for artists, authors, actors and activists; and as an important site associated with the "long Civil Rights Movement." The site is a cultural center where the documentation of the black experience has a long and important tradition, which has continued up to the present. As a complex consisting of three buildings, the later additions reflect the growth of the institution and the fulfillment of Arthur Schomburg's vision. The institution's continued growth and use extends the period of significance of the site to the recent past; for that reason, the Schomburg Center

[33] National Park Service, Organization of American Historians, and the National Museum of African American History and Culture, *African American NHL Assessment Study* (Washington, DC: National Park Service, 2008).

[34] Stephen Pitti, "The American Latino Heritage," in *American Latinos and the Making of the United States: A Theme Study* (Washington, DC: National Park Service, 2013), 13.

[35] Sarah A. Anderson, "'The Place to Go:' The 135th Street Branch Library and the Harlem Renaissance," *The Library Quarterly* 73, 4 (Oct. 2003): 384.

[36] Many African-American historians looked beyond the United States border, but through his collection and curation, which set the foundation for the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Schomburg had a key role in promoting the idea, which only recently has been termed "African Diaspora." Robin D. G. Kelley, "'But a Local Phase of a World Problem': Black History's Global Vision, 1883–1950," *Journal of American History* (86, 3): 1045-1077; Colin A. Palmer, "Defining and Studying the Modern African Diaspora," *Journal of Negro History* 85, 1/2 (Winter-Spring 2000): 27-32.

[37] Schomburg published his work using the Anglicized version of his name (Arthur) instead of Arturo, so Arthur will be used subsequently in this document.

for Research in Black Culture is eligible for NHL consideration under **Exception 8**. The continued growth of this institution is an integral part of the significance for this site.

The growth of the Schomburg Center occurred in three key phases that began in the 1920s. The first phase began in 1921 when progressive librarian Ernestine Rose (1880–1961) and other community leaders turned the humble branch facility into the "place to be" during the Harlem Renaissance. The second phase reflects the transition of the branch library into a research facility after the acquisition of Schomburg's collection in 1926 and the tenure of Schomburg at the branch from 1932 until his death in 1938. The final phase from 1938 to 1992 reflects the development of the Schomburg Center as a nationally-significant institution promoting research on African Diaspora.

Original Branch Library

The West 135th Street Branch Library at 103 West 135th Street was designed in 1904 by Charles McKim and William Kendall of the renowned New York firm McKim, Mead, and White. The firm designed eleven of the thirty-nine libraries that Andrew Carnegie funded with a $5.2 million grant to the New York Public Library system. The neoclassical building cost $80,000 to construct and followed a three-story design carried out in nearly all the Carnegie libraries that included an adult circulation department on the ground floor, a children's room on the second floor, and an adult reading room on the third floor along with a caretakers apartment.[38] The builders were M. Reid and Son, lighting fixtures were provided by Black and Boyd, and all fixed furniture was provided by Phillip Hiss & Co.[39] When the 135th Street Branch was completed in 1905, the surrounding neighborhood largely consisted of recent Jewish immigrants.[40] Not much is known about the programming or additional community functions the building may have served during these early years of operation.

Phase 1: 135th Street Branch during the Harlem Renaissance

By the 1920s, people of African descent who migrated from the American south and immigrated from the Caribbean moved into the neighborhood, marking the beginning of the "Harlem Renaissance."[41] The 135th Street Branch served as an important institution for people to meet, learn, and share ideas. In 1921, librarian Ernestine Rose transferred to the Branch, and during her tenure she positioned the library as a vital part of emerging Harlem culture. The library hosted art exhibits, a theatre troupe, poetry readings, and talks, all of which boosted the productivity and competitiveness of local artists and intellectuals. Rose's efforts also called national attention to the library. In addition, she was instrumental in negotiating the purchase of Schomburg's collection, which consequently made the 135th Street Branch a significant destination for scholarship on the African Diaspora. Because of the combined efforts of Rose and the community, the 135th Street Branch served as an institutional anchor for the Harlem Renaissance that took place between 1919 and 1928.[42]

The 135th Street Branch was an integral component of the Harlem Renaissance landscape of the 1920s. Sarah Anderson, scholar on the Schomburg Center, argues that the development of the branch library into a major research institution is a "permanent legacy of the Harlem Renaissance."[43] Renowned literary figure Langston Hughes left an homage to the library and Rose in his work, reflecting the important role of the library in

[38] Rachel Carley "Schomburg Collection for Research in Black Culture," *Designation List 139 LP-1133.* (New York City: Landmarks Preservation Commission, February 3, 1981).
[39] American Library Association, "Another Library and Assembly Room for Harlem, New York," *Library Journal* 30 (July 1905): 411.
[40] Jeffrey S. Gurock, *When Harlem was Jewish, 1870-1930.* New York: Columbia University Press, 1979.
41 Nathan Irvin Huggins, *Harlem Renaissance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).
[42] Cary D. Wintz and Paul Finkelman, eds., *Encyclopedia of the Harlem Renaissance: A-J* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 245.
[43] Sarah A. Anderson, "'The Place to Go:' The 135th Street Branch Library and the Harlem Renaissance," *The Library Quarterly* 73, 4 (Oct., 2003): 384.

contemporary literary circles.[44] In his poem, "My Early Days in Harlem," Hughes memorialized the important role that the 135th Street Branch played in the Harlem Renaissance, writing:

> On a bright September morning in 1921, I came up out of the subway at 135th and Lenox into the beginnings of the Negro Renaissance. I headed for the Harlem Y.M.C.A down the block, where so many new, young, dark, male arrivals in Harlem have spent early days. The next place I headed to that afternoon was the Harlem Branch Library, just up the street. There, a warm and wonderful librarian, Miss Ernestine Rose, white, made newcomers feel welcome, as did her assistant in charge of the Schomburg Collection, Catherine Latimer, a luscious café au lait.[45]

As Hughes illustrated, the 135th Street Branch served as an institutional anchor for the community, complimenting the nearby Harlem YMCA (designated NHL in 1976 for its association with Claude McKay).

The early history of the Schomburg Center provides an important component for the history of the Harlem Renaissance. The library served as a landmark in the social consciousness for luminaries of the Harlem Renaissance. For men like Hughes, it served as an important stabilizing element in a complicated time of geographic and social transition. For so many others, it served as an outlet for the products of the Harlem Renaissance. At the library authors, artists, and actors could share their work with the public and each other.

These were the places where people like Claude McCay, Florence Mills (residence designated NHL in 1976), and Will Cook (residence designated NHL in 1976) met so many of their fellow artists and shared ideas.

Ernestine Rose and Library Equality

In 1921, white librarian Ernestine Rose was hired at the 135th Street Branch and expanded programming to serve the predominately black community of Harlem. Under her tenure, she brought the library into the national intellectual conversation about librarianship in the era of Jim Crow. Her expansion of programming during the 1920s was innovative and provocative, yet her efforts illustrate a long-running debate in American history about equal access to education, literacy, and public resources. Rose pushed for integration of patrons and employees at the library. She also provoked a national conversation about libraries and segregation during the early 1920s, conducting nation-wide surveys, writing articles, and prompting roundtables at the annual meeting of the Annual Library Association. The 135th Street Branch served as a national model for integrated service and librarianship, and one significantly associated with Ernestine Rose, who was a prominent librarian of potentially national significance. Beyond her work at the Schomburg Center summarized below, additional research about Ernestine Rose could possibly warrant updating the nomination in the future or identification of other sites associated with her life and work.

Rose's career, particularly as it manifested at the 135th Street Branch, reflected a progressive philosophy on library management and a passion for civil rights. Not much is known about Ernestine Rose; she kept her personal life elusive, instead leaving her legacy to be defined by the wake of change she implemented at the 135th Street Branch and in library services more broadly.[46] Rose developed her librarianship philosophy at two branches in New York's Lower East Side during the 1910s. There, she engaged a transitory immigrant community and encouraged the use of the library for not only reading, but also a community space and gallery.

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[44] Anderson, "'The Place to Go…," 384.

[45] While citing the Schomburg collection, Hughes is likely confusing the Division of Negro Literature, History, and Prints maintained in the early 1920s with the Schomburg collection that was purchased later. Langston Hughes, "My Early Days in Harlem," *Freedomways* 3 (1963): 312-14. As cited in: *The Collected Works of Langston Hughes: Essays on art, race, politics, and …*By Langston Hughes, Dolan Hubbard, Leslie Catherine Sanders, 395.

[46] Scant bibliographies include: Betty L. Jenkins, "A White Librarian in Black Harlem," *The Library Quarterly* 60, 3 (Jul., 1990): 216-231; Ann Sandford, "Rescuing Ernestine Rose (1880–1961): Harlem Librarian and Social Activist," *Long Island History Journal* 22, 2 (2011).

It was her experience in the Lower East Side that shaped her approach to the community of Harlem when she took over the 135th Street Branch in 1921 with tremendous success.

Rose's approach was in part a reaction to the librarianship methodologies of the past, which she criticized as disparaging and patronizing. In her 1917 treatise, *Bridging the Gulf: Work with the Russian Jews and Other Newcomers*, she summarized her critique, writing: "The artificial 'missionary spirit,' so lauded in the past, will die, as it should, a natural death.... One cannot patronize and still hope to be accepted as a friend."[47] Her sentiment marked an unapologetic departure from Progressivism that had propelled so much work for libraries in this country and motivated Carnegie's construction of libraries like the 135th Street Branch. Ideally, these libraries served as institutions of Americanization and civilization. In the model Rose criticized, libraries did not conform their programs to the diverse patrons they served.[48]

In contrast, Rose focused her efforts on a genuine interest for the community and a desire to make her facility useful in a variety of ways. When Rose moved to the 135th Street Branch in Harlem, her librarianship philosophy changed focus to reflect the community around her. Just as she had done for the immigrants in the Lower East Side, she systematically explored the best ways to serve the surrounding African and Latin community, engaging churches, schools, and neighbors to extend personal welcomes.

Within months of her hire, Rose began to change policies at the 135th Street Branch to better serve the local community. In 1921, she hired Catherine Allen Latimer, the first black librarian employed by the New York Public Library system. To serve the surrounding Spanish-speaking community, in 1922, Rose hired Pura Belpré, the first Puerto Rican librarian.[49] The 135th Street branch was also the training ground for Regina Andrews, who, after a contentious struggle, was transferred to become the first black library assistant in the New York Public Library System and eventually the first black head librarian when she took over at the 115th Street branch in Morningside Heights.[50]

Rose's hiring of African-Americans and Spanish-speaking librarians was deliberate; the library held a key position in a community that was diverse and multicultural.. Langston Hughes expressed this reality in his poem, "My Early Days in Harlem":

> Harlem-Southern Harlem—the Carolinas, Georgia, Florida-looking for the Promised land—dressed in rhythmic words, painted in bright pictures, dancing to jazz—and ending up in the subway at morning rush time—headed downtown. West Indian Harlem—warm rambunctious sassy remembering Marcus Garvey. Haitian Harlem, Cuban Harlem, little pockets of tropical dreams in alien tongues. Magney Harlem, pulling an Arthur Schomburg from Puerto Rico, pulling an Arna Bontemps all the way from California, a Nora Holt from way out West, an E. Simms Campbell from St. Louis, likewise a Josephine Baker, a Charles S. Johnson from Virginia, an A. Philip Randolph from Florida, a Roy Wilkins from Minnesota, an Alta Douglas from Kansas. Melting pot Harlem-Harlem of honey and chocolate and caramel and rum and vinegar and lemon and lime and gall.[51]

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[47] Quoted in: Anderson, "'The Place to Go…," 389.

[48] Dee Garrison, Apostles of Culture: Public Librarian and American Society, 1876-1920 (New York: Free Press, 1979).

[49] Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture. *Remaking the Past to Make the Future*, 14.

[50] For unknown reason, Ernestine Rose was uncooperative in Anderson's promotion at the 135th Street Branch, and because of direct intervention from W. E. B. DuBois, Anderson was transferred and finally promoted. See: Ethelene Whitmire, "Breaking the Color Barrier: Regina Andrews and the New York Public Library," *Libraries & the Cultural Record* 42, 4 (2007): 409-421.

[51] While citing the Schomburg collection, Hughes is likely confusing the Division of Negro Literature, History, and Prints maintained in the early 1920s with the Schomburg collection that was purchased later. Langston Hughes, "My Early Days in Harlem," Freedomways 3 (1963): 312-14. As cited in: *The Collected Works of Langston Hughes: Essays on art, race, politics, and ...*By Langston Hughes, Dolan Hubbard, Leslie Catherine Sanders, 395.

This diversity explains the appeal to a multicultural man like Schomburg, who saw the 135th Street Branch as an appropriate depository for his collection.

Rose also parlayed her work with the community at the Harlem 135th Street Branch into a national conversation about racial equality in American libraries, holding up the integrated Harlem Branch as an example of integration success.[52] Libraries, like so many public facilities, grappled with the problems of Jim Crow segregation and racial prejudice when serving black and white patrons.[53] Not surprisingly, the approach librarians utilized varied according to regional practices. Libraries in the South often had segregated facilities, though management boards were most often exclusively white.[54]

Largely because of Rose's initiative, the American Library Association briefly held a "Work with the Negroes Roundtable."[55] The conversations at the annual round tables were at times an effort to move past the problems of segregation, and at its worst a combative discussion that represents this country's long, difficult effort to end racial discrimination. Beginning in 1921, a group of librarians met at three consecutive meetings to share how they served and employed African Americans in their communities. Most of the librarians on the roundtable were from southern cities, including Birmingham, Louisville, Norfolk, Jacksonville, and Knoxville. By 1923, the productive camaraderie that seemed to inspire the first roundtables had eroded away into a more combative experience and no further roundtables occurred despite a unanimous vote to do otherwise.[56]

Ernestine Rose's work at the 135th Street Branch reflected a desire to turn the space into a thriving cultural center that effectively engaged the community around it. However, the shift of the branch from a mere assemblage of books and reading spaces into the "place to go" cannot be credited to her alone; rather, she opened the space up to community leaders to facilitate their projects and encourage its expansion. Rose appropriately recognized and tapped into a vibrant community that was already underway in Harlem in the 1920s and called upon the assistance of leaders, including W. E. B. Du Bois and Arthur Schomburg. Consequently, she set the stage for the 135th Street Branch to emerge as the "place to go" during the Harlem Renaissance, and eventually, a leading institution for research on African history and culture.[57] As one scholar appropriately summarized, Rose, "drew on the social capital of the community to create a dynamic relationship between the library and its public."[58]

Division of Negro Literature, History, and Prints

In 1921, Ernestine Rose set aside important works of African history and literature into a special reference collection setting the stage for what would quickly become one of the finest collections in the world for Africana scholarship.[59] As the head librarian, Ernestine Rose's primary focus was ensuring the books and other resources appealed to the community. Rose immediately recognized the demand for a dedicated collection of

[52] Ernestine Rose, "Serving New York's Black City," *Library Journal* 46, 6 (March 15, 1921): 255-258; Ernestine Rose, "Where White and Black Meet," *Southern Workman* 51 (October 1922): 467.

[53] Stephen Cresswell, "The Last Days of Jim Crow in Southern Libraries," *Libraries and Culture* 31, 3/4 (Summer - Fall, 1996): 557-573; Rosemary DuMont, "Race in American Librarianship," *Journal of Library History* 21 (Summer 1986): 488-509; Michael Fultz, "Black Public Libraries in the South in the Era of De Jure Segregation," *Libraries and the Cultural Record*, 41, 3 (Summer, 2006): 337-359; Klaus Musmann, "The Ugly Side of Librarianship: Segregation in Library service from 1900 to 1950," in Tucker, John Mark, ed., *Untold Stories: Civil Rights, Libraries, and Black Librarianship* (Champaign, Ill.: Publication Office, Graduate School of Library and Information Science, 1998).

[54] Ernestine Rose, "Work with Negroes Round Table," *Bulletin of the American Library Association* 15, 4 (July 1921): 200.

[55] George T. Settle, "Work with the Negroes Round Table," *Bulletin of the American Library Association*, 17, 4, (July 1923): 274-279.

[56] Rose, "Work With Negroes Round Table," 200-201.

[57] Celeste Tibbets, *Ernestine Rose and the Origins of the Schomburg Center.* New York: Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, the New York Public Library, 1989.

[58] Anderson, "The Place to Go," 384.

[59] The community comprised of African Americans and new immigrants from the Caribbean, Africa, and elsewhere of African descent. For this reason, this document uses the term "black," borrowing from the same principles that underlie the full name of the institution, which is the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture.

resources on African history and culture. In 1924, Rose initiated an effort to establish a research collection at the library. She turned to the community for help, and that year the Citizens Committee was established for which Arthur Schomburg was elected president. The purpose of the Citizens Committee was, "to make easily available for permanent public use a large and representative body of material expressive of Negro culture in the past and the present."[60] In 1925, that collection was designated the Division of Negro Literature, History, and Prints. The reference collection was housed on the third floor, along with a reading room.[61] It held the library's rarest materials, but also was boosted by items from the private collections of Schomburg, John Bruce, Louise Latimer, and others.[62] This collection was housed in the 135th Street Branch until it justified a dedicated building, which would become the Schomburg Center as it exists today.

In these early stages, Schomburg paid particular interest in the work being carried out at the Harlem Branch. In a special exhibition, Schomburg contributed items. He also later applauded the work, reflecting, "Not long ago, the Public Library of Harlem housed a special exhibition of books, pamphlets, prints and old engravings, that simply said to skeptic and believer alike, to scholar and school-child, to proud black and astonished white, 'Here is the evidence.'"[63] Roses efforts to craft a special division from the Harlem library collection and exhibit material both inspired Schomburg and likely planted the seed for his later involvement, culminating with the donation of his collection.

Additional Cultural Programming at 135th Street Branch

Art Exhibitions

Along with expanding the library's reference section, Rose created new uses for the library that attracted artists, poets, playwrights, and actors. In 1921, Rose launched the first art exhibit at the library. She relied on the volunteer efforts of community members to serve as promoters and hosts for the exhibition, and sent letters to at least 175 pastors asking for help.[64] Titled "Negro Art Exhibit," it featured work from the local and international black community. The next year, the library hosted a second exhibit, this time titled "Exhibition of Negro Artists." The effort to organize and promote the event was also expanded with twenty-seven community members who did everything from select the art and music, to host, publicize, and administer the exhibition. Notable community members served in key roles, such as Louise Latimer who was chair of the art committee, and others served in honorary capacity, including Arthur Schomburg (honorary committee) and A.G. Dill from the *Crisis* (honorary chairman).[65] These juried exhibitions at the 135th Street Branch preceded the more well-known Harmon Exhibition of the Work of Negro Artists, at the International House in New York, which began in 1928 and are generally cited as the first of its kind.[66]

The art exhibitions opened up the library to the community in a new way and drew attention to the institution. Two prominent African-American publications, the *Crisis* (NAACP) and *Opportunity* (National Urban League), covered the art exhibits.[67] Francis Holbrook, artist and art critic for the *Opportunity,* observed the positive consequences such events had on the local community, commenting, "the holding of exhibits and contests gives the artist an opportunity to place his work before the public, either for sale or prizes. This acts as a stimulus and

[60] Herbert Aptheker, ed., *The Correspondence of W.E.B. Du Bois.* Vol. 1. (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1973), 285. As cited in: Anderson, "The Place to Go," 412.
[61] Catherine Allen Latimer, "Where can I Get Material on the Negro," *The Crisis* (June 1934): 164.
[62] Anderson, "The Place to Go," 414.
[63] Arthur Schomburg, "The Negro Digs up His Past," *Survey Graphic* 6 (March 1925): 670.
[64] Anderson, "The Place to Go," 402.
[65] Anderson, "The Place to Go," 403-405.
[66] Anderson, "The Place to Go," 399.
[67] Anderson, "The Place to Go," 401.

calls for greater efforts through competition…."[68] The effort of library staff to open up the space for expanding cultural programming had an immediate and recognizable impact on the community.

Not only was such "stimulus" good for the black artist community, it was also good for the library at a time when Rose struggled to reach the library's neighbors. Historian Sarah Anderson asserts that the large size of the planning effort was not to meet the burden of organizing the exhibit, but rather, reflects the "conscious cultivation of the cultural ground of the community." In other words, such events reflect one more instance that library staff, led by Rose, actively pursued innovative ways to engage the community, setting the stage for the institution to emerge by the end of the decade as a significant component of 1920s Harlem. As Anderson summarizes, "this was outreach at its height."[69]

Theatre

The 135th Street Branch library also played an important role in the 1920s Harlem theater movement. In the early 1920s, many community leaders, including W. E. B. Du Bois, lamented the quality of commercial theater, which was described by one contemporary critic as "cheap melodrama and the cheaper musical comedy." [70] To counteract mainstream Harlem theater, leaders of the NAACP and the National Urban League pushed for professional community theater with plays written by black authors and produced for black audiences. Both the NAACP and the National Urban League sponsored black drama contests in their publications, the *Crisis* and the *Opportunity*, respectively, and eventually the NAACP-affiliated Krigwa Players emerged to perform the prizewinning plays.[71] In 1926, at the prodding of W. E. B. Du Bois, the library basement became the home of the Krigwa Players Little Negro Theatre.[72] This space became a permanent theater area, and by the 1940s it was known as the American Negro Theatre. This served as the early stage for many legendary American actors including Harry Belafonte, Sidney Poitier, and Alice Childress.[73]

Comparables

The limited National Historic Landmarks that recognize the Harlem Renaissance are the homes of artists, composers, musicians, singers and authors. The homes of Will Marion Cook (composer and conductor), James Weldon Johnson (composer, author, activist), and Florence Mills (singer) are NHLs in Harlem. In addition, the nearby Harlem YMCA is designated because of Claude McKay's temporary residence there from 1941 to 1946. These nominations were created in 1976 by the Afro-American Bicentennial Corporation, and the history of Harlem has been overlooked ever since.

Phase 2: Arturo Schomburg and His African Diaspora Collection

In 1926, the head librarian Ernestine Rose and the National Urban League worked with the Carnegie Foundation to purchase local self-taught scholar and bibliophile Arthur Alfonso Schomburg's collection for $10,000.[74] Schomburg's collection transformed the library's reference section into a premier research destination. His unusual focus on the African Diaspora reflects his multi-cultural background: Born in 1874 in Puerto Rico to a free African laundress and German merchant, he migrated to New York City, where he first identified with the Latin expatriate community, but would come to define his life by a large body of scholarly

[68] Francis Holbrook, "A Group of Negro Artists." *Opportunity* 1 (July 1923): 213 As cited in Anderson, "The Place to Go," 401.
[69] Anderson, 404.
[70] Morgan, *New York Age* (June 19, 1920): 6, as cited in John G. Monroe, "The Harlem Little Theatre Movement, 1920-1929," *Journal of American Culture* 6,4 (Winter 1983): 64.
[71] Cary D. Wintz and Paul Finkelman, eds., *Encyclopedia of the Harlem Renaissance: A-J* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 246.
[72] During the 1920s, Du Bois became increasingly involved in the library. Anderson, "The Place to Go," 402-409.
[73] Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture. *Report on Activities from July 1984-June 1985.* (New York: The New York Public Library Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations, 1986), 3.
[74] Catherine Allen Latimer, "Where can I Get Material on the Negro," *The Crisis* (June 1934): 164.

work on African history and culture. His collection transformed scholarship on the African Diaspora and was instrumental in making African history part of an important legacy of the Harlem Renaissance. The Schomburg Center is the only site that represents Schomburg in the United States; all known residences have been demolished.

Early Life

Arthur (Arturo) Alfonso Schomburg was born in 1874 in Puerto Rico, though his past is a fuzzy mix of contradictory records and disjointed accounts of his childhood and lineage.[75] (Figure 17) By most accounts, and according to his biographer Elinor Des Verney Sinnette, Schomburg was born to an emancipated black woman from St. Thomas in Puerto Rico. Though he never knew his father, Schomburg's birth certificate lists his father as a German merchant.[76] He spent most of his youth with his great uncle on Saint Thomas in the Virgin Islands. There is a discrepancy on whether he was ever formally educated; despite his insistence on primary education, there are no official records. The lack of information from his childhood remained a point of stress and concern for him throughout his life.

Schomburg's early experience in America reflects the complexities of immigration and multicultural identity during this period. When Schomburg was 16, he sailed from his great uncle's home in Saint Thomas to New York City. He carried a note from his former employer, a stationary shop owner, as a letter of introduction for work experience. He also carried letters from a San Juan cigar maker, a social reference that would introduce him to New York cigar makers and ultimately, a social circle of Latino expatriates. After landing in New York, he quickly joined a vibrant group of expatriates from Puerto Rico and Cuba, including the iconic Cuban revolutionary Jose Marti, who promoted a nationalist movement for the islands. In the first years of his American life, Schomburg identified with this Latin community. He helped found and became secretary of Las Dos Antillas (the Two Antilles or the Two Caribbean), a club advocating for independence for Puerto Rico and Cuba.[77]

Schomburg ultimately made his new life in America within the American black community. By 1895, Schomburg's social circle shifted from an expatriate community of nationalists to a multicultural black community. His interests shifted from the Puerto Rican liberation movement to the black civil rights movement. He adopted the Anglicized version of his name. That year, he married Elizabeth Hatcher, an African American from Virginia. They had three children before her death in 1900. In 1902, Schomburg married Elizabeth Taylor, an African American from North Carolina with whom he had two more children. He later married a third African American, Elizabeth Green from Virginia, in 1914 and had three more children.[78]

Schomburg also established a professional life in America that helped facilitate connections and collecting. In 1906, Schomburg was hired as a messenger for the Bankers Trust Company, where he was eventually promoted to head of the foreign mail division because of his fluency in Spanish and ability to read French. In addition, he devoted considerable time to the Prince Hall Masons serving as Secretary. He also participated in many scholarly and intellectual organizations. He used his employment and other associations to establish connections around the country and internationally to acquire material for his collection.

[75] For a commentary on the difficulty in accessing clear accounts of Schomburg's biography, see: Elinor Des Verney Sinnette. *Arthur Alfonso Schomburg: Black Bibliophile and Collector* (Detroit: The New York Public Library and Wayne State University Press, 1989), 2.
[76] Sinnette. Arthur Alfonso Schomburg, 7-8.
[77] Sinnette. Arthur Alfonso Schomburg, 16-23.
[78] Sinnette. Arthur Alfonso Schomburg, 23.

Schomburg and "Racial Uplift"

Schomburg's intellectual pursuits reflect an important moment in American history when efforts for racial uplift concentrated on improving the social, economic, and political equality of African Americans.[79] For Schomburg, efforts to restore cultural identity were integral to this broader effort. Schomburg insisted that "history must restore what slavery took away, for it is the social damage of slavery that the present generations must repair and offset."[80] It was with his collection and the history it informed that Schomburg approached racial uplift in a pioneering and significant way. His collection and his work reflect an important moment in American politics and history, which are best embodied by the Schomburg Center that houses his collection and continues his work.

Schomburg and other black intellectuals struggled to combat a dominant narrative that on the one hand sought to reaffirm derogatory stereotypes of minorities, particularly people of African descent, and at the same time justify contemporary treatment of minorities in Jim Crow America. Schomburg and his colleagues were well aware of these sources, reviewed them, commented on them, and sought to contradict them. The rise in Africana scholarship in the first two decades of the twentieth century coincided with an effort by black intellectuals and activists for "racial uplift." Perhaps the most iconic moment from this effort is the founding of the **National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP)** in 1909.[81] Du Bois and many others promoted the idea of the "talented tenth," and Africana scholarly organizations supported those individuals. Reaffirming the history of African Americans was a significant part of that effort.

Schomburg found his place amidst this larger effort of scholarly stimulation and political activism as a path-breaking collector and self-taught intellectual. Schomburg's entry into the organized African American scholarly community took place after he began collecting. In 1911, Schomburg and his mentor John Edward Bruce, along with several other men, founded the **Negro Society for Historical Research**. This society grew out of a Sunday literary and social club amongst the men and served as a local counterpart to larger national organizations. The goal of the Society was to collect "historical data relating to the Negro race." According to the organization's constitution, this data would be used to "show that the Negro race has a history that antedates that of the proud Anglo-Saxon race."[82] When considered within the broader context of Jim Crow America and taken alongside coinciding efforts for racial uplift, it is clear that men like Schomburg pursued their collections and research with a zeal that was motivated by their daily experience. Their intent went beyond shifting the dominant historical narrative; they saw their work as combating the racial prejudice that had placed the history of African Americans into obscurity.

In 1914, Schomburg joined the **American Negro Academy**, and he served as president of the organization beginning in 1920.[83] Founded in 1897, the organization was established by four African American men in Washington, D.C., who included Reverend Alexander Crummell, Professor Kelly Miller from Howard University, and the scholar John Wesley Cromwell. Prominent black scholars including W. E. B. Du Bois joined the original ranks, which was limited to forty members. The well-known Du Bois was a prolific writer and graduate of Harvard University. Cromwell published the first history of African Americans, *The Negro in*

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[79] Kevin Gaines, "Rethinking Race and Class in African-American Struggles for Equality, 1885- 1941," *American Historical Review* 102, 2 (April, 1997): 378-387; Henry Louis Gates and Gene Andrew Jarrett, eds., *The New Negro: Readings on Race, Representation, and African American Culture, 1892-1938* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2007); Wilson J. Moses, "The Lost World of the Negro, 1895-1919: Black Literary and Intellectual Life before the "Renaissance,"" *Black American Literature Forum* 21, 1/2 (Spring - Summer, 1987): 61-84.

[80] Schomburg, "The Negro Digs up His Past," 670.

[81] Charles Flint Kellogg, NAACP: A History of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1967).

[82] As cited in: Sinnette. *Arthur Alfonso Schomburg*, 41-43.

[83] Sinnette. Arthur Alfonso Schomburg, 50-53.

American History. In the eyes of the self-taught Schomburg, this organization served as a venerated group of respected and admired scholars.

Schomburg's African Diaspora Collection

Schomburg joined his academically-trained contemporaries, who largely concentrated on African-American history or the Atlantic Passage, by broadening his intellectual perspective to one that was transnational. In his 1925 article "The Negro Digs up His Past," he first articulated a conceptualization of Africana scholarship that was by the 1950s termed the "African Diaspora."[84] His efforts to compile a transnational and multi-linguistic archive of black history made a "black international imaginary" possible. Thus, because of Schomburg's work, scholars crafted a history of people "connected to each other not through national belonging, but through the complicated linkages of diaspora."[85] As historian Adalaine Holton notes, "By recovering, archiving, and popularizing a dynamic history of the African Diaspora, Schomburg hoped to give people of African descent a sense of themselves as a cohesive group with a long-standing, accomplished, and diverse history."[86] Schomburg's collection and his promotion of a historical narrative from it informed later efforts for civil rights, social equality and even cultural identity movements.

Schomburg's collection and scholarly work also provides an important international perspective on African American struggles for equality and civil rights. For many Americans like Schomburg, the effort to achieve greater economic, political, and social equality was intrinsically linked to broader transnational issues about international colonialism. Historian Adalaine Holton suggests Schomburg's Afrodiasporic collection and the ideas he expressed in "The Negro Digs Up His Past" about the political significance of historical scholarship "heralds the transformation in the field of black history that accompanied the New Negro movement in the post-World War I era."[87] For Schomburg, reclaiming the history of African people—particularly the stories of colonialism and slavery—were integral to achieving equality. A visionary, Schomburg recognized that "the subjugation and manipulation of knowledge [was] a powerful and continuing legacy of slavery [and colonization]."[88] Thus, his efforts at "historical recovery and dissemination" were meant to take back, or "decolonize" history. By doing so, he could instill black pride, unite a disperse people, and combat white prejudice. Schomburg's collection represents the politics that are intrinsically bound into making history.[89]

It is unclear when Schomburg began his collection, and there are several divergent stories that explain the moment of his life that provoked the efforts. Schomburg often recounted a story from his childhood during which his fifth-grade teacher declared that "black people had no history, no heroes, no great moments." According to Schomburg, the remarks inspired him to prove otherwise.[90] Whether this moment actually occurred or not, it nonetheless underlines an important sentiment that likely characterized the experience of Schomburg and many other people of African descent who were told that their history and culture did not and could not compare to the experiences and contributions of Europeans. This sentiment clearly motivated Schomburg. His research interests, his broad focus on sources of the African Diaspora, and the consequential formation of the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture set his legacy as one of the most nationally significant members of a national black bibliophile effort.

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[84] Schomburg, Arthur, "The Negro Digs up His Past," *Survey Graphic* 6 (March 1925): 670-672. For historiographic summary of this concept, see: Robin D. G. Kelley, "'But a Local Phase of a World Problem': Black History's Global Vision, 1883-1950," *Journal of American History* (86, 3): 1045-1077; Colin A. Palmer, "Defining and Studying the Modern African Diaspora," *Journal of Negro History* 85, 1/2 (Winter-Spring 2000): 27-32.

[85] Holton, "Decolonizing History: Arthur Schomburg's Afrodiasporic Archive," 220.

[86] Holton, "Decolonizing History: Arthur Schomburg's Afrodiasporic Archive," 219.

[87] Adalaine Holton, "Decolonizing History: Arthur Schomburg's Afrodiasporic Archive," *Journal of African American History* 92, 2 (Spring 2007): 219.

[88] Holton. "Decolonizing History: Arthur Schomburg's Afrodiasporic Archive," 228.

[89] Holton. "Decolonizing History: Arthur Schomburg's Afrodiasporic Archive," 218-238.

[90] Sinnette. *Arthur Alfonso Schomburg*, 13 and for speculation about the validity of this story, see note 10 on 203.

Schomburg was adept at locating sources and constructed an international network to find them. His ability to find obscure sources through an international network earned him the nickname "the Sherlock Holmes of Negro History."[91] Guided by a well-thumbed edition of Henri Grégoire's 1808 *De la Littérature des Nègres* (*An Enquiry Concerning the Intellectual and Moral Faculties, and Literature of Negroes*), Schomburg combed through bookstores, auction catalogs, warehouses, and other locations for material.[92] A contemporary described Schomburg as having an "infinite patience and [a] sixth sense for rarities.[93] To find books in foreign markets, Schomburg encouraged his friends traveling abroad, including Langston Hughes, to look on his behalf and even co-opted a pen pal in Haiti.[94] Yet, despite his items from England, France, Spain, and Russia, he only traveled abroad himself once in 1926 after the sale of his collection, and even then he used his money to find more material which he in turn donated to the 135th Street Branch, As his biographer notes, "The amazing nature of Schomburg's accomplishments is that he was able to amass such an extensive and valuable collection with limited finances and relatively circumscribed mobility."[95]

Schomburg's collection was acknowledged by contemporaries for being one of the finest in the country and unmatched in geographic scope. In 1922, editors of *The Crisis*, highlighted Schomburg's library, writing:

> [Schomburg's] library, devoted exclusively to books pertaining to the Negro race and by persons of Negro descent, is one of the most remarkable libraries of its kind in existence.... The value of Mr. Schomburg's library is attested fully by the fact that his home in Brooklyn, New York, has become the Mecca for scholars from all parts of the United States and many have come from abroad to do research therein. Mr. Schomburg has immortalized himself in the great zeal with which he has applied himself to the task of preserving the evidences of Negro culture in all ages.[96]

Such a laudatory description illustrates the significance of Schomburg's collection to the local community and black bibliophiles, as well as leaders of the NAACP, the premier African-American organization. Such recognition and praise explains why Rose and others sought Schomburg's collection for the 135th Street Branch.

Schomburg was not the first black bibliophile, nor was he alone in his collecting mission. The first known Afro-American bibliophile was abolitionist David Ruggles (1810–1849). In Philadelphia, the Reading Room Society, founded in 1828, and the Banneker Literary Institute, founded in 1854, served as libraries and research societies for the African American community.[97] However, little detail is known about the few African American bibliophiles and collectors who were Schomburg's contemporaries. Among the small group, Schomburg is the most well-known individual. Schomburg, like so many of his cohorts, believed that collecting was not merely a sound investment or delightful hobby, unlike other white collectors such as J. P. Morgan (NHL, 1975). Instead, black bibliophiles like Schomburg pursued their efforts with missionary zeal, believing that they were contributing to the larger effort for racial uplift at the time.

Beyond amassing a personal collection, Schomburg was also an integral figure in the promotion of black bibliophilia. In 1916, Schomburg worked with several other men from the American Negro Academy, including Henry Proctor Slaughter and John Edward Bruce, to launch the **Negro Book Collectors Exchange**. The men planned to develop an international register of private collections. They also hoped to pool money so that their combined effort would permit them to purchase rare works from auction or private hands. Though the

[91] As cited in: Sinnette. *Arthur Alfonso Schomburg*, 2.
[92] Sinnette. Arthur Alfonso Schomburg, 91.
[93] Springarn, "Schomburg as a Fellow Book Collector, as cited in Sinnette ,87
[94] Sinnette. Arthur Alfonso Schomburg, 91-93.
[95] Sinnette. Arthur Alfonso Schomburg, 92.
[96] "The Horizon." *The Crisis* 23 (March 1922): 220, as Cited in, Anderson, 414.
[97] Sinnette. Arthur Alfonso Schomburg, 76-82.

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[91] As cited in: Sinnette. *Arthur Alfonso Schomburg*, 2.
[92] Sinnette. Arthur Alfonso Schomburg, 91.
[93] Springarn, "Schomburg as a Fellow Book Collector, as cited in Sinnette ,87
[94] Sinnette. Arthur Alfonso Schomburg, 91-93.
[95] Sinnette. Arthur Alfonso Schomburg, 92.
[96] "The Horizon." *The Crisis* 23 (March 1922): 220, as Cited in, Anderson, 414.
[97] Sinnette. Arthur Alfonso Schomburg, 76-82.

organization never took off, the concept reflected the general interest of Schomburg and his colleagues to make dispersed collections around the world more accessible and "centralize all literature written by colored people."[98] Ultimately, the Schomburg Center would realize this lofty goal.

Schomburg's Sale to Division of Negro Literature, History, and Prints

Schomburg joined the practice of many of his colleagues when, in 1926, he agreed to sell his collection for $10,000 to the New York Public Library system to bolster the Division of Negro Literature, History, and Prints housed on the third floor of the 135th Street Branch. Unlike many other sales or donations by his contemporaries, Schomburg's sale to a local library ensured open access to the public. Schomburg had previously received offers on his collection, which he refused perhaps hoping for a more important repository to hold it.[99] In partnership with the National Urban League, Rose of the 135th Street Branch convinced the Carnegie Foundation to acquire the collection for the library. In 1927, the Arthur A. Schomburg Collection formally opened to the public at the 135th Street Branch. Though the main branch of the library in midtown was still processing items even after it opened, the collection was energetically received by the community.

At the time of the sale, it included "2,932 volumes, 1,124 pamphlets, and many valuable prints and manuscripts."[100] Key pieces from Schomburg's collection included editions of the Banneker almanacs for the years 1792, 1793, 1794, and 1817.[101] He focused on works from abolitionists, and had several speeches from Frederick Douglas. He also acquired derogatory works, or writings that supported slavery, including *The Negro, a Menace to American Civilization* and *The Negro, a Beast.* Many of his pieces included letters and papers from artists, authors, and political leaders of African descent around the African Diaspora, including letters and other memorabilia of Toussaint L'Ouverture. The "crown jewel" was a collection of poems by Juan Latino printed in 1573.[102]

During this time, many collectors donated or sold their collections to universities and major institutions. In 1914, Dr. Jesse Moorland donated his collection of 3,000 books, plus objects, engravings, and manuscripts, to Howard University.[103] In 1925, Daniel Murray, staff at the Library of Congress, bequeathed to the library his collection of 1,448 books and pamphlets, along with ephemera.[104] Other major acquisitions that came in later years were sold by collectors rather than donated. In 1929, Charles Tuttle sold his collection of nearly 4,000 books to Fisk University for $5,000.[105] Between 1929 to 1936, Fisk University, under the direction of Schomburg, amassed its large collection with a $105,000 grant from the Julius Rosenwald Fund and a $50,000 grant from the Carnegie Foundation. The last major collection to be sold from this group of bibliophiles was in 1946, when Henry Slaughter sold his collection of 10,000 books as well as manuscripts, ephemera, and photographs to Atlanta University for $25,000.[106]

Schomburg Curatorship

In 1932, a second Carnegie grant enabled the New York Public Library to employ Schomburg as curator of the Division at the 135th Street Branch.[107] The grant reunited Schomburg with his collection, but it also allowed researchers to tap into his unmatched knowledge of the African Diaspora. Under the curatorship of Arthur

[98] As quoted by Sinnette from typescript of John Wesley Cromwell Scrapbook: Sinnette. *Arthur Alfonso Schomburg*, 73.
[99] These offers are mentioned by Sinnette in passing, though not cited. Sinnette. *Arthur Alfonso Schomburg*, 74.
[100] *Bulletin of the New York Public* Library 31 (April 1927): 295, As cited in Sinnette, 141
[101] Sinnette. Arthur Alfonso Schomburg,, 89.
[102] Sinnette. Arthur Alfonso Schomburg,98.
[103] Sinnette. Arthur Alfonso Schomburg, 82.
[104] Mollie E. Dunlap, "Special Collections of Negro Literature in the United States," *Journal of Negro Education* 4, 4(Oct. 1935): 485.
[105] Sinnette. Arthur Alfonso Schomburg, 154.
[106] Sinnette. Arthur Alfonso Schomburg, 80-82.
[107] Biddle, "'A Partnership in Progress' the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture," 331.

Schomburg from 1932 until his death in 1938, the Division of Negro Literature, History, and Prints took shape as a nationally significant collection, which drew increasing attention from scholars, political and community leaders, and the general public.

To promote the collection, Schomburg organized an exhibition that highlighted prize pieces from the Division at the New York Public Library Main Branch. The special exhibition first opened on January 3, 1934, and it remained on view for a month. Schomburg's exhibition contained items from African Americans influential during the Abolitionist Movement, including Alexander Crummell, and accounts of blacks who gained their own freedom, including Frederick Douglas and Booker T. Washington. Another section of the exhibition was titled, "The Negro in the Arts." Other significant pieces, including works on Toussaint L'Ouverture, were on display in two additional cases.[108]

This "modest" exhibition was juxtaposed with loaned pieces from the library of John Pierpont Morgan (NHL, 1975). The irony of such a pairing did not escape the press or Schomburg. Schomburg remarked of the pairing: "Today these men are going to have their jubilee in the smaller exhibition hall … next to the great exhibition of illuminated manuscripts belonging to the famous John P. Morgan collection…. Think of it! The rich and the poor…in juxtaposition on Fifth Avenue…."[109] Despite the fact that the exhibitions featured the collections of two bibliophiles, the men's different backgrounds and area of interest were stark. The collections, like the libraries that house them today, reveal two perspectives on a shared practice of collecting in modern America.

Throughout the 1930s, staff at the library continued to promote the collection to scholars. In 1934, assistant librarian Catherine Latimer informed a predominantly African American audience of the *Crisis,* published by the NAACP, about the bourgeoning institution in, "Where Can I Get Material on the Negro."[110] However, academics also recognize the unmatched quality of the collection. In a 1935 article summarizing special collections for Africana scholarship nationwide, the Schomburg Collection received extensive focus. Mollie Dunlap called the Schomburg Collection, the "rarest and most complete collection, in this country, of books and manuscripts dealing with the Negro throughout the world and dating as far back as 1632."[111] A page and a half was devoted to the collection, while other collections for institutions such as Fisk University and Howard University barely received a column each. The attention demonstrates the Schomburg Collection's superior position to other collections at the time. It also highlights the exceptional nature of the Division and its prized Schomburg collection, which was at a public institution rather than private university.

Along with bourgeoning research Division, the 135th Street Branch continued to serve an important social and intellectual space during the Depression, functioning as a "coordinating center" for the WPA projects that took place in Harlem. The Federal Art Project encouraged residents to use the library to learn about African history and culture, arguing, "Books are Weapons…. (Figure 18) The library housed a WPA Federal Writers Project. It helped provide a forum for playwrights and actors in the American Negro Threatre. From the library, artists such as Aaron Douglas created murals that transformed the landscape of Harlem as part of the Public Works of Art Project (PWAP). In 1936, the Historic Records Survey (HRS), a Works Progress Administration program, began the first phase of a detailed catalog of the Division's collection. In 1942, the survey was completed and released as the *Calendar of the Manuscripts in the Schomburg Collection of Negro Literature.* This was the first detailed catalog of the library's holdings, and included complete entries for 2,271 items.[112] The WPA projects

[108] Sinnette. Arthur Alfonso Schomburg, 178.
[109] As cited in: Sinnette. *Arthur Alfonso Schomburg*, 178
[110] Latimer, "Where can I Get Material on the Negro," 164-165.
[111] Dunlap "Special Collections of Negro Literature in the United States," 483.
[112] Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture. *Remaking the Past to Make the Future*, 17.

that took place in or were coordinated by the library "served as developmental laboratories for black scholars who later went on to become the leading minds in their areas of specialization."[113]

Comparables

Many scholars recognize the national significance of Schomburg. No other site remains that represents his life or work. Comparable nominations for a collection by a bibliophile include the Morgan Library and Museum (NHL, 1975).

Phase 3: Schomburg Center as a Nationally-Significant Institution

After Schomburg's death in 1938, the Division was renamed the Schomburg Collection of Negro History and Literature (Schomburg Collection). The Schomburg Collection increasingly became the place to go for scholarship on people of African descent, and in the mid-twentieth century, the idea of the African Diaspora became widely adopted by Africana scholars conducting historical and cultural research.[114] The embrace of this idea reflects the emerging efforts at the time for social and political equality during the "Long Civil Rights Movement." In the mid-twentieth century, people flocked to the Schomburg Collection because it heralded the ideals of intellectual freedom, social equality, and cultural identity gaining hold at the time.[115] Since 1938, the Schomburg Collection has provided intellectual and cultural evidence for those seeking social equality through history, and in the process, scholars who consulted the collection perpetuated and expanded Schomburg's pioneering idea of the African Diaspora.

The Schomburg Collection and the Long Civil Rights Movement

Amidst the Long Civil Rights Movement (1930s to 1960s), the Schomburg Center emerged as a significant site for research on African Americans and the African Diaspora. Serving as a pillar for intellectual understanding and cultural identity, the Schomburg embodied ideals of social equality that complimented coinciding efforts by activists to gain civil and political equality.

Serving as intellectual fuel, the Schomburg Collection informed many pioneering and nationally- significant studies that ultimately led to major advancements for civil and political equality in America. One of the most well-known scholarly works was Gunnar Myrdal classic sociology study *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy.*[116] At the provocation of the Carnegie Foundation in 1938, Swedish sociologist Dr Gunnar Myrdal based his research for the path-breaking and provocative *An American Dilemma* at the Schomburg Collection of Negro History and Literature. Published in 1944, the study summarized the racial problems within America's social, economic, and legal systems and had a lasting impact on American history and sociology.[117] Many scholars believe this study spurred Harry S. Truman to establish his Committee on Civil Rights two years later, and the final report "adopted the analytical framework and endorsed the conclusions set forth in Gunnar Myrdal's *An American Dilemma*…."[118] In the 1955, one sociologist went so far

[113] Biddle, "'A Partnership in Progress' the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture," 332.

[114] Colin A. Palmer, "Defining and Studying the Modern African Diaspora," *Journal of Negro History* 85, 1/2 (Winter-Spring 2000): 27-32.

[115] Much scholarship has been accomplished lately shifting our conception of the Civil Rights Movement from the monumental mid-century events (from *Brown vs Board* to the Voting Rights Act) to a longer version that began with the New Left in the 1930s. For a brief summary, see: Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, "The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past," *Journal of American History* 91, 4 (March 2005): 1233-1263.

[116] Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, Inc., 1944).

[117] Maribel Morey, "A Reconsideration of An American Dilemma," *Reviews in American History* 40, 4 (December 2012): 686-692; Walter A. Jackson, *Gunnar Myrdal and America's Conscience: Social Engineering and Racial Liberalism, 1938–1987* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990).

[118] Quote from Morey, "A Reconsideration of An American Dilemma," 686; Stephan Thernstrom and Abigail Thernstrom, *America in Black and White: One Nation Indivisible* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1999), 91; Steven F. Lawson, ed., President's Committee on Civil Rights, *To Secure These Rights: The Report of Harry S. Truman's Committee on Civil Rights* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2003), 28–29.

as to declare *An American Dilemma* "the most powerful instrument of action in the field of race relations since Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.[119] Most significantly, the study was cited by the Supreme Court when determining in *Brown v. Board of Education* that segregated schools was unconstitutional.

After Schomburg's death, collection administrators saw themselves as part of the struggle for civil rights and social equality. In 1939, Dr. Lawrence D. Reddick was appointed to take over leadership of the Schomburg Collection. Reddick placed an increased emphasis on public events. He launched a lecture series and worked with the NAACP and National Urban League to co-sponsor events that "debated issues of the day."[120] Reddick believed that the Schomburg Collection should "take a positive interest in race relations at home and abroad."[121] Stanton Biddle, former reference librarian and archivist for the Schomburg Center, noted in a 1978 article that the Schomburg Center had become, during the 1940s, a "civic and cultural institution playing an activist role in the community which had by now become national in scope and varied in interest."[122] Though Biddle saw Reddick's tenure in the 1940s as an exceptional period, the efforts to engage the public through lectures and other programming, specifically with coordination from the NAACP and National Urban League, actually carried on a long tradition that began with Ernestine Rose.

In 1948, Jean Blackwell Hutson was appointed chief of the Schomburg Collections. Encouraged to disengage from an activist role, she nonetheless continued to publicize the collection.[123] The collection continued to serve as an important source of information for American politics during the 1950s, the most significant of which was Dr. Kenneth Clark's report of the effects of segregation on black and white children used in *Brown* in 1954.[124]

Amidst the civil rights demonstrations, riots, and political debates of the 1960s, the Schomburg Collection also served as an invaluable resource for those seeking to understand these events. By 1966, the collection had increased to 43,000 volumes, hundreds of thousands of manuscripts, along with new medium of sources such as microfilm, microfiche, motion picture film, audio tapes, slides, and photographs.[125] There was a steady demand for access to the collection; between 1960 and 1966, the annual number of registrants at the Schomburg Center doubled, and by 1972 it quadrupled. Summarizing that period, Biddle notes that, "Black people suddenly became visible in America's consciousness again and the Schomburg Collection was "re-discovered" as a research facility where answers to the burning questions of the day could be found." Biddle suggests that journalists, educators, and scholars who were "unprepared to explain or even discuss" events turned to the Schomburg for answers.[126] Thus, the Schomburg Collection, in the midst of a rise in civil rights activism and black cultural awareness, became a central figure in prominent national concerns.

Dedicated Space

Despite its important function, the institution was in need of preservation and administrative assistance. Hutson's greatest legacy to the Schomburg would be continuing the call of Ernestine Rose and Arthur Schomburg for a dedicated space for the research collection. In 1966, at an award ceremony for mertious service Hutson "sounded the alarm" about the condition of the collection. Hutson outlined the problems of preserving the Schomburg Collection, which was "literally rotting away." Summarizing the state of the library facility at the 135th Street Branch, she reported, "The effects of overuse by readers, air pollution, exposure to

[119] Quoted from Morey, "A Reconsideration of An American Dilemma," 687. Walter A. Jackson, *Gunnar Myrdal and America's Conscience: Social Engineering and Racial Liberalism, 1938–1987* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 294.
[120] Biddle, "'A Partnership in Progress' the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture," 332.
[121] Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture. *Remaking the Past to Make the Future*, 17.
[122] Biddle, "'A Partnership in Progress' the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture," 332.
[123] Biddle, "'A Partnership in Progress' the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture," 332.
[124] Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture. *Remaking the Past to Make the Future*, 21-22.
[125] Biddle, "'A Partnership in Progress' the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture," 334.
[126] Biddle, "'A Partnership in Progress' the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture," 333.

excessive heat and humidity, and overcrowded storage facilities threatened to destroy [the collection] that she, Arthur Schomburg, and others had created."[127]

Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture

Hutson's warnings about the facility provoked a wave of reform for the Schomburg Collection. Up until that period, the Division and later the Schomburg Collection had been administered under the branch system, so preservation of priceless material was overlooked and underfunded. In 1972, the Schomburg Collection was designated a research library within The New York Public Library system, becoming the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture. With the change, the staff consequently had "access to the wealth of knowledge and expertise developed by the Research Libraries in dealing with the many problems the staff had been trying to cope with in isolation up until that time."[128] The renewed commitment to the preservation of its collection was supported by several grants, including two from the National Endowment for the Humanities. By 1978, the holdings had expanded to over "70,000 volumes, 16,000 reels of microfilm, 5,000 microfiche, 6,000 photographic records, 2,500 reels of audio tape, 6500 film slides and several hundred thousand manuscripts and archival records."[129] By 1985, that collection had grown to nearly 3 million items, including 87,000 volumes dating from the 16th century, 165,000 photographs, 700 motion pictures and videotapes, 5,000 hours of oral history recordings, 10,000 phonodiscs, and manuscripts.[130]

To support proper care, administration, and access, The New York Public Library also committed to constructing a new, dedicated site for the collection, moving it out of the older 135th Street Branch building. The New York Public Library presented a plan to the city for a new facility for the research and archival collection in 1970. In 1973, the site on Lenox Ave between 135th and 136th was purchased by the city, with demolition approved in 1974. However, because of budgetary cuts, construction did not begin until 1977 with $3.7 million in funding though the Public Works Act of 1976. The building that now houses the Schomburg Center was completed in 1980.[131] A second addition in 1991 expanded the public programming capabilities of the site, continuing the community center programming launched at the 135th Street Branch. The construction of the building marked a critical moment of maturation for the long trajectory of growth launched by Rose and realized by Schomburg. The physical growth of the institution realizes the vision of Schomburg, in which his collection would spark research and conversation about the African Diaspora. Without the expanded access enabled by the institution's physical growth, such realities would not be possible.

Present Use

The Schomburg Center collections have been the fuel for ground breaking scholarship and exhibits that changed how we understand American history, including the African Burial Ground in New York City. It has also provided important documentary information for significant American cultural works, including the epic film *Roots.*[132] Today, the Schomburg Center is a unique repository of more than 10 million items.

The Schomburg Center continues to serve as a premier collection for African Diaspora scholarship and as of 2014 had over ten million items. A 2001 *Harvard Guide to African-American History* gave credence to the collection that has applied since its establishment: Calling it "…perhaps the world's largest collection of materials on Africa and the African Diaspora," the Schomburg Collection was listed first and given unqualified

[127] Biddle, "'A Partnership in Progress' the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture," 334.
[128] Biddle, "'A Partnership in Progress' the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture," 336.
[129] Biddle, "'A Partnership in Progress' the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture," 337.
[130] Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture. *Report on Activities from July 1984- June 1985* (New York: The New York Public Library Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations, 1986), 9.
[131] Biddle, "'A Partnership in Progress' the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture," 335.
[132] No cited author, "Recalling the Early Days at the Schomburg Center, A Harlem Cultural Hub.," *New York Times,* August 29, 1987.

stature compared to counterparts at other facilities, including the Moorland-Springarn Research Center, Howard University; the Amistad Research Center, Tulane University; the Fisk University Library; the Robert W. Woodruff Library, Atlanta University Center; the Hampton University Archives; and the Tuskegee University Archives.[133] In 2015 the Schomburg Center was awarded the prestigious 2015 National Medal for Museum and Library Service, presented by First Lady Michelle Obama.

Comparables

Most libraries are designated for their architectural significance, or because they are the oldest. The New York Public Library, Main Branch is one example. By contrast, though the original 135th Street Branch was built by the renowned architectural firm of McKim Mead and White, the building is representative of many libraries just like it built throughout the city and around the nation. The Schomburg Center's significance is with its role in research, not in architecture. There is no research facility or library designated for its role in Africana scholarship or research.

Comparables include other research facilities, of which there are few designated as National Historic Landmarks. The American Antiquarian Society, in Worcester, Massachusetts, was designated in 1968 for its role as a national-level historical society that houses "the single largest collection of printed source material related to the early history, literature, and culture of the United States."[134] An institution dedicated to studying a specific culture is the nearby Hispanic Society of America (NHL, 2012). However, this institution did not launch a new conceptualization of historical scholarship, unlike the Schomburg Center, which was founded to promote research based on the revolutionizing idea of the African Diaspora. In addition, unlike the well-endowed HSA, with a building constructed to house the collection and outfitted with high-style interiors, the Schomburg Collection originated in a humble and quickly inadequate branch library.

Other designated comparable properties include museums that were constructed to house significant collections and that have maintained a continuity of use. Included in this is the Mercer Museum (NHL, 1985) and Wagner Free Institute of Science (NHL, 1990). Like these sites, the Schomburg Center was constructed to house the best collection of African history, literature, and culture in the nation.

Exception 8

Encompassing the original 1905 branch library and two recent additions, the current site represents the legacy of Schomburg and is the fulfillment of his vision for a research center that promoted scholarly work on the African Diaspora. The new additions revived the traditional function of the site, which combined research, culture, and education. The design, construction, and style of the new addition were rooted in African—not Beaux Arts—traditions, reflecting the interests of Schomburg and the focus of the collection on the very building that housed it. Most importantly, it allowed the New York Public Library system to fulfill its obligation for a safe and accessible research center for an internationally-significant collection. Without the full assemblage, the Schomburg Center would not realize the vision of Schomburg, Rose, and so many others. For this reason, the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture is eligible for NHL consideration under Exception 8.

[133] Higginbotham, Evelyn Brooks, Leon F. Litwack, and Darlene Clark Hine, eds. *The Harvard Guide to African-American History.* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 45.

[134] S. Allen Chambers, Jr., *National Landmarks, America's Treasures* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 2000), 224.

Conclusion

Today, the Schomburg maintains a reputation as a premier collection for understanding the African Diaspora. As iconic actor Harry Belafonte, who began his career in the basement theater of the 135th Street Branch, noted, "It houses so much information about not just blacks in the United States but blacks in Africa and the African Diaspora…. For that reason alone, I think it's a national treasure."[135] Despite its growth over time, the mission of the organization has remained consistent: to collect documentation of the African Diaspora, to preserve that material, and to share it. Schomburg's work continues to define the legacy of the collection, as declared by former chief Howard Dodson: "Without [Schomburg's] pioneering work and his unique collection, we would not be here today."[136] Yet, the physical growth of the sites that house that collection reflect the ambitions of the people who first developed the pioneering reference and archival collection. Reflecting on the 1980 addition, and the growth of the organization, librarian Stanton Biddle concluded, "Ernestine Rose's prediction and Arthur Schomburg's dreams have been fulfilled beyond their greatest expectations."[137] The Schomburg Center is the only place that can reflect the ambitious vision of Arthur Schomburg; memorialize the pioneering work of Ernestine Rose and her contemporaries; and capture an important story of the Harlem Renaissance. The scholarly and artistic work carried out at the Schomburg Center over a near century has illuminated important aspects of American history and transformed American politics and culture. The Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture is for these reasons nationally significant under NHL criteria 1, 2, and 3.

[135] No cited author, "Recalling the Early Days at the Schomburg Center, A Harlem Cultural Hub," *New York Times,* August 29, 1987.
[136] Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture. *Remaking the Past to Make the Future,* 5
[137] Biddle, "'A Partnership in Progress' the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture," 337.

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Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture. Prints and Photograph Division.

University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries. Special Collections and University Archives. W. E. B. Du Bois Papers.

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

___Preliminary Determination of Individual Listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
_X_ Previously Listed in the National Register. NR # 78001881; 09/21/1978
___Previously Determined Eligible by the National Register.
___Designated a National Historic Landmark.
___Recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey: #
___Recorded by Historic American Engineering Record: #

Primary Location of Additional Data:

___State Historic Preservation Office
___Other State Agency
___Federal Agency
___Local Government
___University
_X_ Other (Specify Repository): Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

Acreage of Property: less than 1 acre

UTM References: Zone 37, Easting 546748.0474162451, Northing 8163530.249431671

Verbal Boundary Description: The boundaries are the buildings occupied by the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, including 103 West 135th Street, 515 Lenox Avenue/Malcolm X Boulevard, and the connecting building. It is situated on lots 26 and 29, New York City zoning map number 6A. It excludes the Countee Cullen Library.

Boundary Justification: The boundary includes the footprint of the property which is historically associated with scholarly and community functions of the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture.

11. FORM PREPARED BY

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DESIGNATED A NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK
December 23, 2016

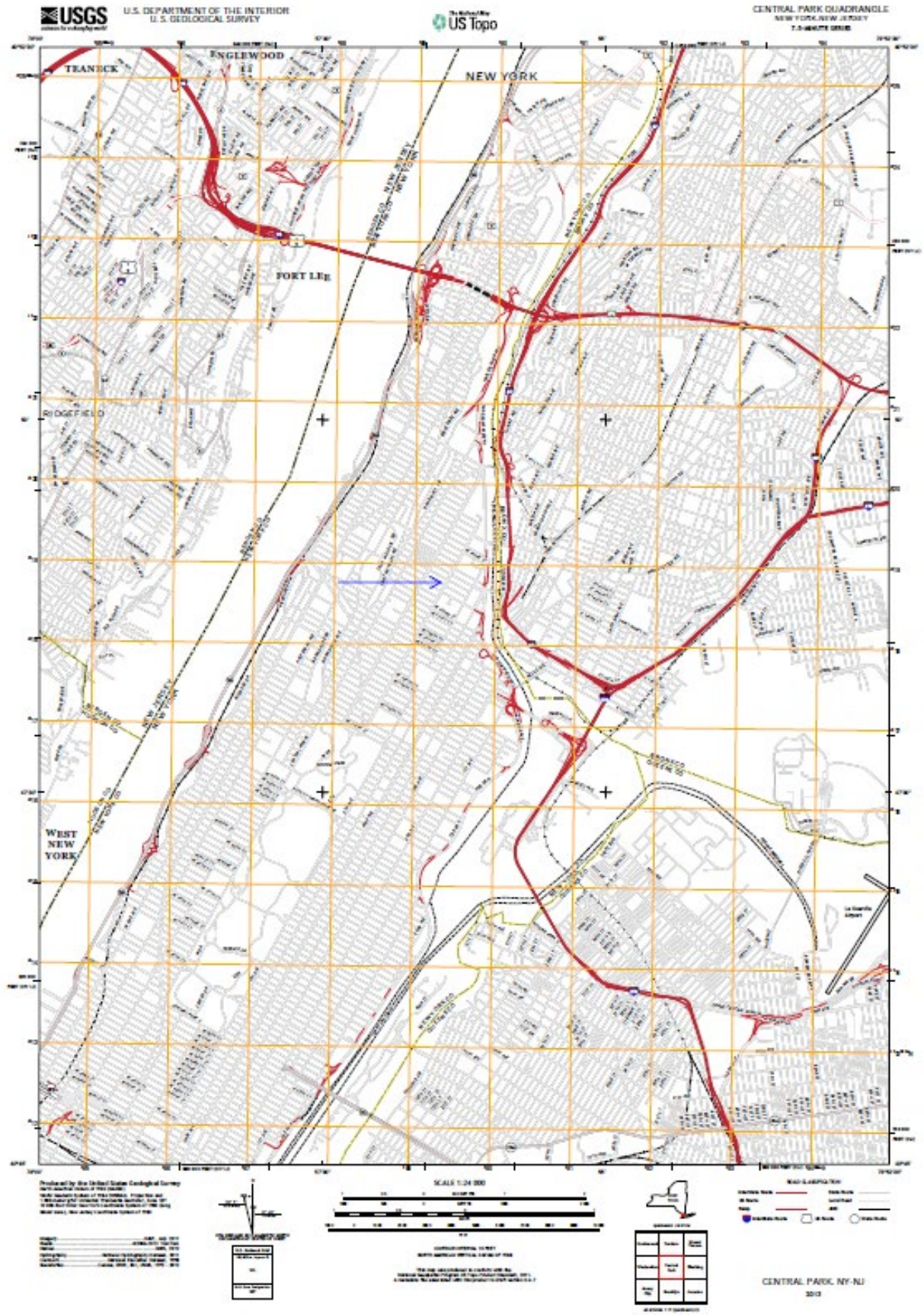

USGS
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
U.S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY
US Topo
CENTRAL PARK QUADRANGLE
NEW YORK-NEW JERSEY
TEANECK
ENGLEWOOD
NEW YORK
FORT LEE
RIDGEFIELD
WEST NEW YORK
CENTRAL PARK, NY-NJ



Figure 1. Schomburg Center at the corner of 135th Street and Lenox Avenue, looking northwest, 2012. National Park Service

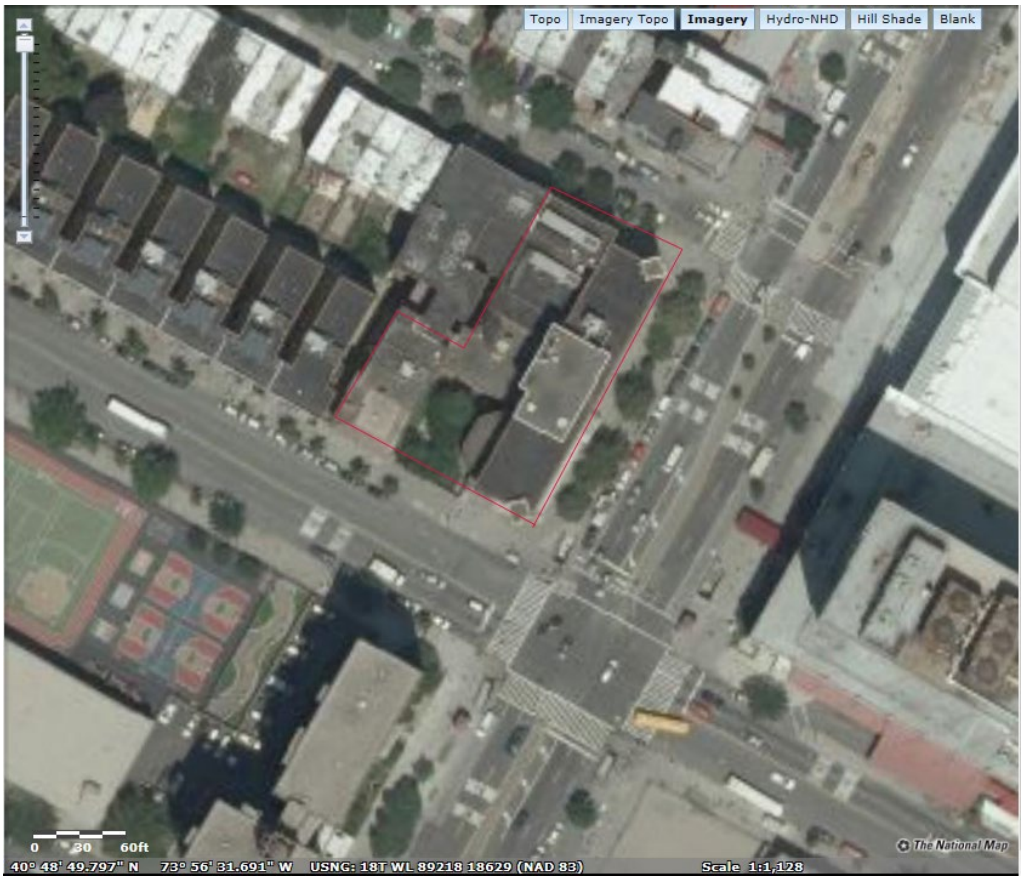


Figure 2. Schomburg complex. *USGS*



Figure 3. Schomburg Center setting, showing relationship to the Harlem YMCA. *USGS*

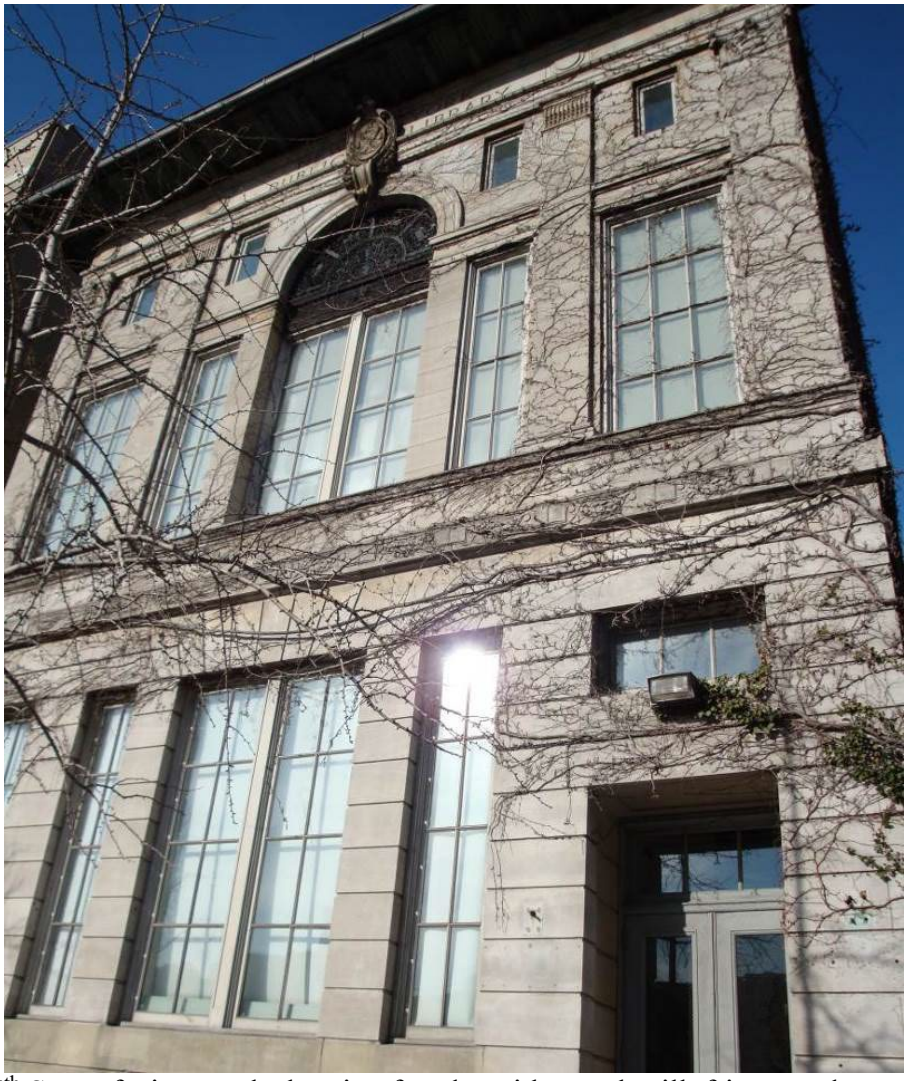


Figure 4. From 135th Street facing north showing façade, with metal grill, frieze, and restored windows. 135th Street Branch, 2012. *National Park Service*

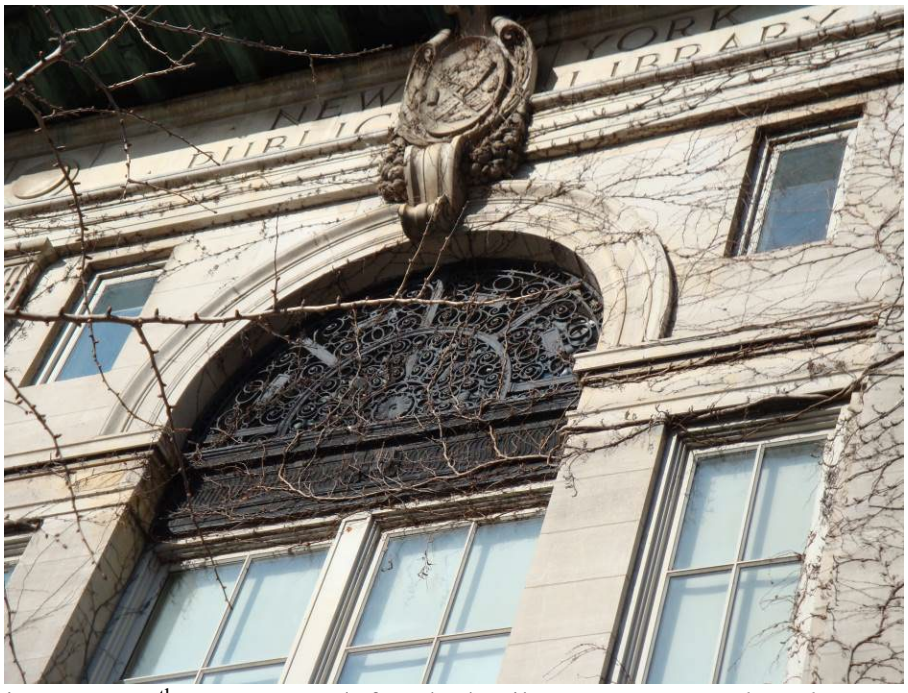


Figure 5. 135th Street Branch façade details, 2012. *National Park Service*



Figure 6. 135th Street Branch vestibule facing north, showing original woodwork and marble wainscotting, 2012. *National Park Service*



Figure 7. 135th Street Branch stairwell from third floor, showing original woodwork, 2012. *National Park Service*



Figure 8. 135th Street Branch first-floor exhibit hall from rear facing south, showing original floors, pillars, baseboards,and plaster walls. Electic light and HVAC charteristic of modernization throughout building, 2015. *Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture*

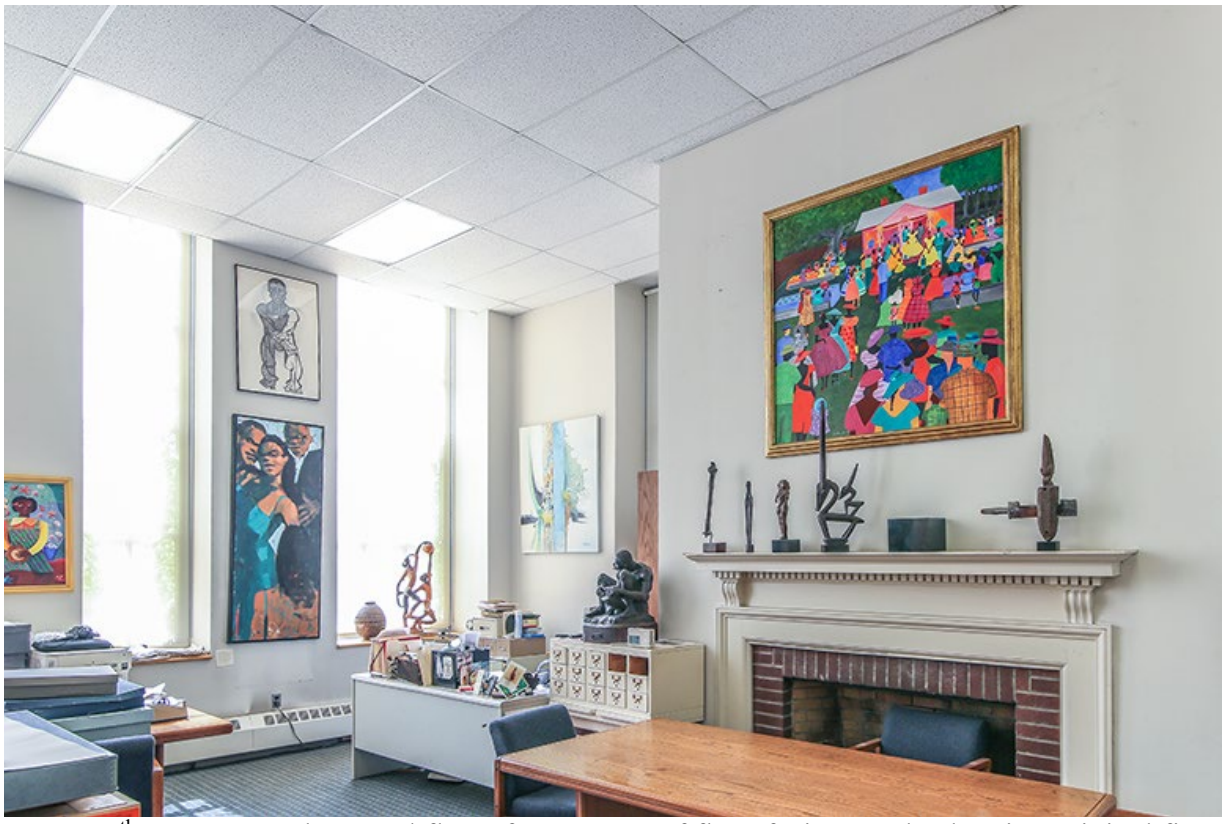


Figure 9. 135th Street Branch second floor, from center of floor facing south, showing original fireplace. *Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture*



Figure 10. Schomburg Center at Lenox Avenue, looking northwest, 2012. *National Park Service*



Figure 11. Schomburg Center at the corner of 136th Street and Lenox Avenue, looking northwest, 2012. *National Park Service*



Figure 12. Reading Room looking north showing Aaron Douglas mural *Song of the Towers*, 2012. *National Park Service*

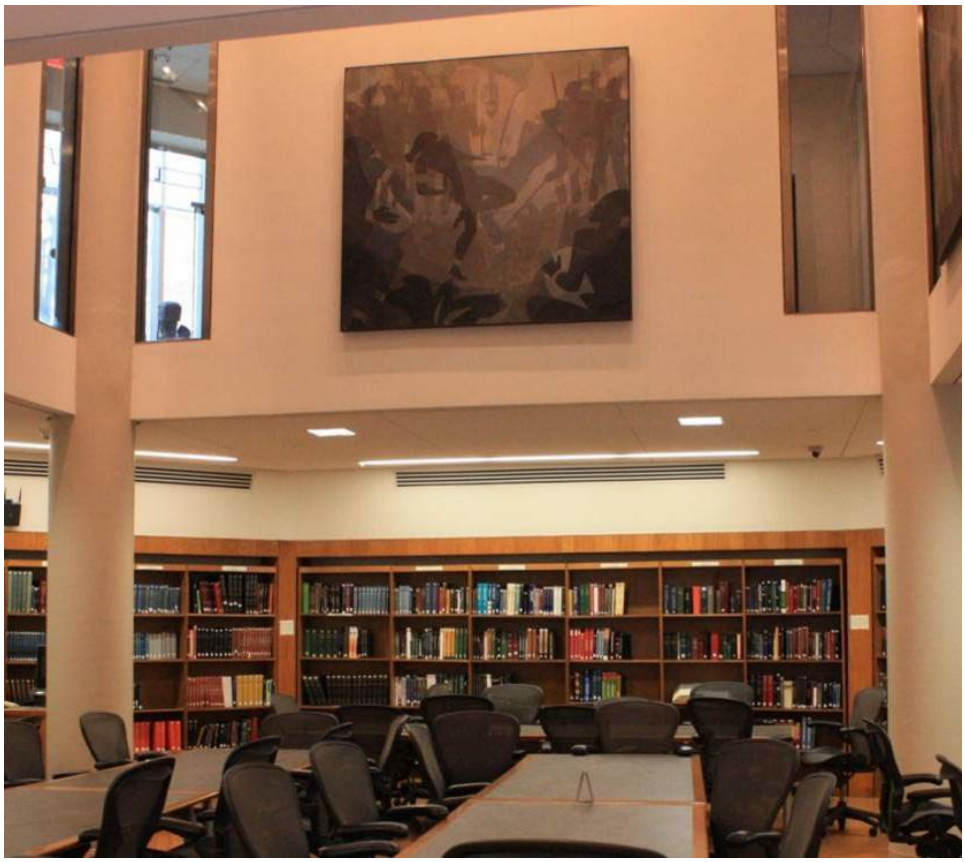


Figure 13. Reading Room looking east showing Aaron Douglas mural *The Negro in an African Setting*, 2012. *National Park Service*



Figure 14. Reading Room looking south showing Aaron Douglas mural *An Idyll of the Deep South*, 2012. *National Park Service*



Figure 15. "Cosmogram" with *Rivers* by Houston Conwill, 1991 expansion; Langston Hughes cremated remains below, 2012. *National Park Service*



Figure 16. Langston Hughes Auditorium, 2012. *National Park Service*



Figure 17. Arthur (Arturo) Alfonso Schomburg. *Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture*

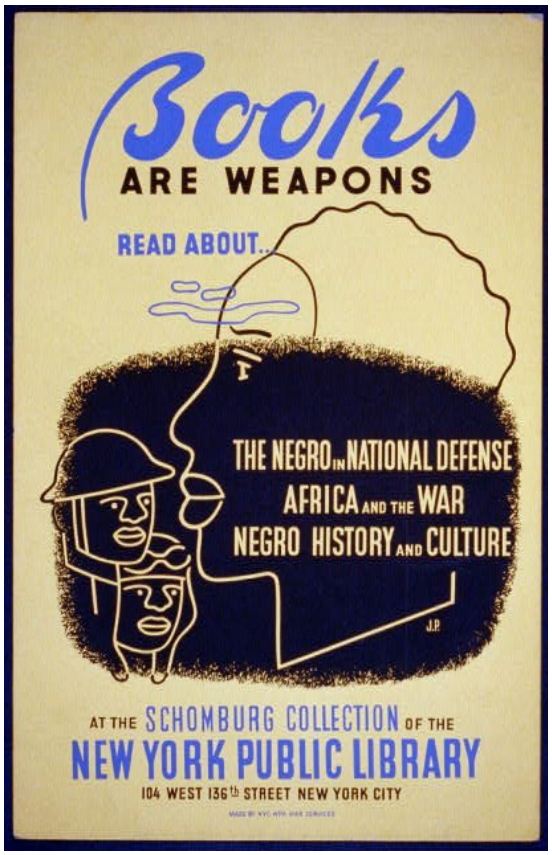


Figure 18. Schomburg library poster. Federal Art Project. 1941. *Library of Congress*