



# WSBREC

Western States Black Research and Educational Center

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*"To know where you're going ... You have to know where you've been."*

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WSBREC was founded in 1972 by Dr. Mayme A. Clayton, Ph. D., and maintains the largest and most substantial collection of rare books, documents, films, music, photographs, and memorabilia on African American culture and history in the Western United States. WSBREC's goal is to establish the *Mayme A. Clayton Library and Cultural Center*, a world-class, library-based, museum and cultural center dedicated to African American intelligence and creativity with Dr. Clayton's historically significant Collection at the core.

## Collecting African Americana

by Avery Clayton

The debut of Alex Haley's classic family saga "Roots" in 1976 set off a firestorm of interest in African American life and culture. For the first time, African Americans en masse began to look at their culture from a new perspective. Genealogical services boomed as Americans took an interest in discovering their ancestors. For African Americans, no longer was the black past tainted solely by the stigma of slavery. Unlike any other television drama of its' time, "Roots" captured the dignity of Africans sold into slavery and the rich tapestry of black families, destined to live out their lives on foreign shores, in brutal circumstances.

In conversation, enlightened folk speak of how sad it is that young African Americans are so woefully unaware of their heritage. There is little doubt that the "media" has had more to do with shaping ideas and attitudes about what it means to be black in America than the truth of African American history. The "media" projection is so pervasive even non-black youth emulate the media construct of blackness: the Africanization of America. The current hit movie; "Malibu's Most Wanted" is an example. Black and non-black youth are prey to the media's dictates of what makes one hip.

However, many are valuing things that reflect the fullness of the African American experience, not just the hip-hop or gangsta rap sub-cultures. Celebrities like Oprah Winfrey, Bill Cosby, Whoopi Goldberg, and Branford Marsalis collect African Americana making it attractive.

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## Film Festival - Reel Black Cowboys

The 5th Annual Reel Black Cowboys Film Festival will be presented August 2 – 3, 2003 at the Autry Museum of Western Heritage, 4700 Western Heritage Way in Griffith Park, Los Angeles. This year's African American Cinema Society's LifeTime Achievement honoree is noted actor, activist and cowboy Obba Babatunde. Obba is one of the busiest actors in



Obba Babatunde

Hollywood. His award will be presented by last year's recipient, actor Glynn Turman at the gala opening night reception, Friday, August 2, 2003, 6 – 9 PM. Opening night festivities will include a buffet style dinner (6 – 7 PM) on the Patio of the Autry Museum. Mike Mann & the Night Riders Band will perform along

with vocalist, Lena Cardwell. Lariat expert, Garrett Davis, Kenny Call, Hector Aguilar and the world famous Buffalo Soldiers will be on hand to entertain. The Inglewood Guys & Dolls Senior Square Dance Troop will also entertain. The festival, sponsored by the Los Angeles Cultural Affairs Department and the Southern California Gas Company, a Sempra Energy Utility is a fundraiser for Western States Black Research and Educational Center. Please make plans to attend. Tickets for the opening gala are \$25.00. Film festival tickets range from \$3 for students to \$7 for adults. What a rip-roaring bargain! Get out yer boots, yer ten-gallon hats and come on out and holler a while! Yee Haw!

To make reservations call: Marti Townsend, Festival Coordinator at (323) 252-3967 or Avery Clayton, WSBREC Executive Director at (626) 794-4677



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**Special Birthday Tribute for Dr. Mayme Clayton**

Special Birthday Tribute at CAAM for Dr. Mayme Clayton  
 August 2, 2003, 6:30 PM to 9 PM, the California African American Museum will present "The Pioneers and the Prolific," a celebrity dinner-reception launching the opening of "Close Up in Black," an exhibition of vintage and contemporary African American film posters. Dr. Clayton who will be celebrating a milestone birthday will be honored with a special tribute in recognition of her birthday (August 4th) and heroic 40-year effort to save African American history. Tickets are \$100. For additional information, contact the CAAM at (213) 744-7432.

**WSBREC Needs Your Support!**

Please make tax-deductible contribution to:

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*Collecting African Americana ... continued from page 1*

Public institutions, such as the New York City Public Library which houses the famous Arthur A. Schomburg Collection and Duke University have focused on black memorabilia for their collections.

Early issues of the NAACP magazine, Crisis edited by W.E.B. DuBois sells for as much as \$100 - \$150. A pomade canister, produced by millionaire businesswoman, Madame C.J. Walker, hair care entrepreneur can sell for as much as \$500. Prolific African American filmmaker Oscar Micheaux movie posters, books, and playbills draw top dollar.

Many collectors have focused on objects from slavery, the most painful period of African American history. There is something cathartic about owning what once was a source of oppression. It offers a sense of taking back one's power and control. Some of the most powerful objects from slavery are slave documents, such as plantation inventories, passes permitting slaves to travel from one place to another. Identification slave tags; shackles, whips and collar braces. Certificates of Freedom are also highly collectible.

What makes the Collection assembled by Dr. Mayme Clayton and maintained by Western States Black Research and Educational Center so remarkable is that it contains all of the things listed above, but the flagship collection is the Literary Collection. As an academic resource, its ability to educate and delight is vast. The Literary Collection offers us a chance to understand the times and mind set of the ancestors; an unparalleled glimpse into the life of someone black who may have lived 300 years ago. The Literary Collection offers an opportunity to establish an African American Think Tank in which great minds can research and commiserate on how to improve the quality of life for African Americans and others.

Over 20,000 books written by or about African Americans make up WSBREC's Literary Collection. The Collection dates to the first book, published by an African American author, Phillis Wheatley in 1773.

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The book was actually published in London, England because at the time there were laws forbidding teaching Africans to read or write. The peculiar institution of American slavery is the only one in modern history that sought to deprive its victim of their language and culture.

Slaves speaking in their native tongues were punished. Phillis' master, John Wheatley could have been publicly flogged and fined \$5000 for his indiscretion. \$5000 in 2003 is a significant fine. In 1773 they meant they didn't want any slaves reading and writing. The book titled, "Poems on Subjects Religious and Moral," was published when Phillis was only 16 years old.

Phillis arrived in America at the age of nine. By the time she was thirteen she had mastered English and went on to master classic Latin. John Wheatley was so impressed with her abilities that he allowed her to be taught along with his daughter. The book was one of several that she penned: the beginning of a tradition of excellence for African American teenage girls. Every teenage girl should be taught about Phillis Wheatley.

In October of 2002, Los Angeles County Supervisor Yvonne Brathwaite Burke, a longtime supporter of WSBREC arranged to have an inventory and appraisal assessment of the Collection done. The firm of Goldsmid & Allen Appraisers conducted the assessment. On December 19, 2002 they published their findings in a 55-page document which is a glowing evaluation of the Collection's cultural and monetary value.

In the assessment report prepared by Charles Goldsmid and Robert Allen they state, "There is no question that WSBREC is a fine core collection with important sub-collections and fine high spots.

It could become the starter for a major cultural institution.

The fact that the Collection has a long and present history in the Los Angeles community as a cultural resource and it has a very promising future as a well-planned, budget supervised, and well staffed institution serving the community with even greater accessibility obliges us to consider the addition of its value as a recognized entity....recognized at its core for its association with its respected and duly honored founder, Dr. Mayme Clayton."

Collecting African Americana is a way to learn about the past and claim personal control. Most collectors collect because the things they assemble bring them pleasure and/or a sense of well being. If you decide to collect, be clear about what it is that you like and educate yourself. Network with others who share your interest. Read *Images in Black: 150 Years of Black Collectibles*, Douglas Congdon-Martin, Schiffer Limited Publishing, Pennsylvania, 1990; *Black Collectibles Sold in America*, P.J. Gibbs. Collector Books, a division of Schroeder Publishing, Paducah, Kentucky, 1990; and *The Art of Collecting Black Memorabilia*, Philip J. Merrill. Knowledge is power.

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## Black History Facts: African Americana Coast to Coast By Avery Clayton

### *Biographical Sketch of Arturo (Arthur) Alonso Schomburg (1874 – 1938)* *Bibliophile, Historian, Writer, Collector, Curator*

The Arthur A. Schomburg Collection in the New York City Public Library is the largest existing collection of African Americana in the world. The Collection assembled by Dr. Clayton is second in size and scholarly scope to the Schomburg Collection. An amazing feat for a retired university librarian of modest means. When questioned about how she was able to amass the collection, she simply says, "when ever something worth collecting came along, the money just appeared."

Arturo Alfonso Schomburg was born January 24, 1874 in Puerto Rico. Arturo was "Afroboriqueno" (Black Puerto Rican). His early education took place in Puerto Rico. Arturo's fifth grade teacher is reported to have told him that "Black people have no history, no heroes, no great moments." This was the catalyst that set his life in motion. He developed a thirst for knowledge about people of African descent and began his lifelong quest studying the history and collecting the books and artifacts that made up the core of his extensive library.



Arturo Alfonso Schomburg

He came to the Lower East Side of New York in April 1891 at the impressionable age of 17. He became involved with the revolutionary movements of the immigrant Cubans and Puerto Ricans living in that area, regularly attending meetings and working at odd jobs while attending night school at Manhattan Central High School.

Schomburg became a Mason and met bibliophile (book lover) John Edward Bruce, a.k.a. "Bruce Grit." Bruce introduced him to the African-American intellectual community of the Harlem

Renaissance and encouraged him to study and write about the African world history.

Schomburg collected letters, manuscripts, posters, playbills and paintings. He was said to be especially proud of his Benjamin Banneker Almanacs. Schomburg, like Clayton traveled all over the world in the pursuit of rare and unusual items that represented blacks in America and the Diaspora. The history of the Caribbean and Latin America and the lives of heroic people in that region was also an area of special interest to Schomburg. No doubt, an effort to refute the comments of his fifth grade teacher.

Schomburg's collection became the cornerstone of the New York Public Library's Division of Negro Literature. In 1926 the Library purchased his collection of 10,000 items with the assistance of the Carnegie Corporation. Schomburg generously shared his knowledge with the young scholars and writers of the Harlem Renaissance. One of his primary objectives was to combat racial prejudice by providing proof of the extraordinary contributions of people of African descent to the world history. He wrote, "I depart now on a mission of love to recapture my lost heritage."

Auturo Arthur Alfonso "Afroboriqueno" Schomburg died from complications of a dental infection at Brooklyn's Madison Park Hospital on June 10, 1938.

America and the world owe Arthur A. Schomburg a great debt. The arts have since time immemorial been the measure of civilizations. The works of art created by a people proclaim their existence. Without those expressions, it is as though they never existed. If the artifacts that represent a people aren't cared for, sought after and indeed loved they die of neglect. Thank you Arthur A. Schomburg and Mayme A. Clayton for saving the history of black folk.