

19th Century Black Power Exhibit Opens at Newark Public Library

Explores the Arts, Lives and Politics of African Americans in Newark

Newark, NJ, July 16, 2021 – The Newark Public Library’s recently opened exhibit, [*Black Power! 19th Century: Newark’s First African American Rebellion*](#), encompasses Black history on a global and local scale. This important exhibit, open through August 31, presents little known research about slavery, the Underground Railroad and local Black churches. It establishes a clear connection between Black activism in the 1800s and Newark’s 1960s Black Power Movement.

The exhibit features artifacts including shackles more than 250 years old, found on a New Jersey plantation and on loan from the NJ Department of Transportation, and a wide variety of contemporaneous newspaper articles. Also on display are multimedia productions exploring topics that range from the outlawing of public gatherings of Black residents in Newark to the importance of Black churches in creating a sense of freedom.

Many of this country's best-known Black leaders, including Frederick Douglass and later Mary B. Talbert, W. E. B. Dubois, Mathew Henson and Booker T. Washington, were welcomed by Newark’s Black community. Samuel Cornish, co-editor of the nation’s first African American newspaper, lived in the city for several years.

Noelle Lorraine Williams, recipient of the Giles Wright Award for Contributions to African American History in New Jersey, is a Newark-based historian who served as curator and researcher on the project. “I was inspired to create the exhibition after doing extensive research on Newark’s early African American community,” Williams said. “I want visitors to understand the long history of African American contributions and activism in New Jersey, as well as how Blacks worked against slavery here and in other states.”

Newark Public Library received a project grant from the New Jersey Historical Commission, a division of the Department of State, for fabrication of the exhibition. The Library in collaboration with the New Jersey Department of Transportation and the Form Design Studio at Rutgers University—Newark will create a 3D print of the 18th century

shackles. The City of Newark Creative Catalyst grant enabled the production of two historical videos. PNC Foundation is a long-time, generous supporter of the library's annual Black History Celebration, including the 2021 celebration, The Art and Beauty of Black Power: A Century of Cinema, Dance and Music, which this exhibit complements.

The multimedia portion of the exhibit features noted Newark artists Janétza Maria Miranda, Khali Raymond, Adrienne Wheeler and Jillian Rock. New Jersey-based Gold Standard Productions collaborated on the production of the historical videos.

The exhibit may be viewed on the second floor of the Main branch through August 31. It can also be viewed virtually [here](#). A reception for the exhibit will be held on Wednesday, August 18th from 6 to 8 p.m.

Newark Public Library is located at 5 Washington Street in downtown Newark, NJ. Built in 1899 with a design inspired by a 15th-century Florence palazzo, the library also includes interactive exhibit galleries, large scale event space and an auditorium. The library's Special Collections Department includes the [Philip Roth Personal Library](#), [the James Brown African American Room](#), [the New Jersey Hispanic Research and Information Center](#), [the Charles F. Cummings New Jersey Information Center](#) and [the Special Collections Division](#) - a major collection of graphic and visual arts. Be sure to follow us on social media to learn more about our upcoming events and programs!