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Learn about African American Tea Culture at the Parkway Central Branch of the Free Library of Philadelphia with “Black Tea Rhapsody: An Homage to African American Tea Culture” Exhibition

Philadelphia, PA – The Parkway Central branch of the Free Library of Philadelphia in Pennsylvania is proud to host the “Black Tea Rhapsody: An Homage to African American Tea Culture” exhibition. This multimedia art showcase born at Xavier University of Louisiana celebrating African American tea traditions will open with an event on August 16, 2024, and will continue to be on display until October 1, 2024. Xavier University of Louisiana, which is about to celebrate 100 years of service, previously hosted the exhibit in 2023.

The “Black Tea Rhapsody” exhibition is a vibrant exploration of African American tea culture, featuring the works of Dr. Rolanda Spencer, a lecturer in Xavier’s Department of African American and Diaspora Studies, and artists Herman Israel Spencer of Rochester, New York and native New Orleanian Roy Handy. This exhibition includes a unique blend of photographs, artifacts, and interactive displays that cover various themes such as Spirit, Medicine and Wellness, Black Men in Tea Spaces, and Community. Spanning from the 1800s to the present, these themes illustrate the significant role tea has played in African American life, from spiritual practices to community gatherings.

“This is a wonderful opportunity, given the [Parkway Central branch of the Free Library of Philadelphia]’s significant role in promoting cultural diversity and community engagement,” wrote **Dr. Spencer** about the upcoming display. “We first showcased ‘Black Tea Rhapsody’ last July, and it was very well received. Following its success, the exhibition is now traveling nationally!”

In addition to the stunning visual displays, the exhibition will also feature historical photos and artifacts donated by individuals from across the United States, offering a comprehensive and rich narrative of African American tea traditions.

The highlight of the event will be a panel discussion with esteemed figures from the tea community and related fields from across the nation. Panelists include **Latonia Cokely**, owner of Adjournal Tea Room in Lanham, Maryland; **Dr. Dana Nettles**, co-founder of Dr. Nettles Natural Beauty in Mobile, Alabama; **Rev Anthony Todd Jackson** of the House of Spiritual Purpose in Houston, Texas; **Kim Johnson**, director of the Georgettes Tea Room House Renovation Project in Miami, Florida; and **Chantrelle Edwards**, owner of HellaTea in Oakland, California. The panel can be viewed [here](#).

These experts will examine the historical and modern roles of tea in African American culture, discussing its links to wellness, the significance of tea spaces for black men, and the role of tea in fostering community ties. The panel aims to provide insights and stimulate conversations about the cultural and social impacts of tea.

“The root of the word ‘curate’ is to care for, or cure,” says **Suzanna Urminska**, curator of exhibitions at the Free Library of Philadelphia, “so we are deeply honored to welcome Dr. Spencer as a guest curator with her exhibit that engages our patrons through the legacies and futures of restorative cultural practices.”

“The African American culture has deep roots in healing medicines. What is fascinating and informative is this marriage of what was once thought of as strictly European interaction- ‘High Tea-’ we now see was used to organize and create social change,” shared **K. Michelle Watson**, library supervisor 1, Central Senior Services at the Parkway Central Library. “Dr. Rolanda Spencer’s book should be read and on our bookshelves as another example of history once lost but now found.”

The Parkway Central branch library, known for its grand architecture and extensive collections, is an ideal venue to celebrate and explore African American heritage. The lead architect, Julian Abele, was the first African American to graduate from the University of Pennsylvania’s School of Architecture. Hosting the “Black Tea Rhapsody” exhibition in such a prominent public space underscores the cultural significance of African American tea traditions and offers visitors an opportunity to connect with this rich legacy.

Join this enlightening exhibition and panel discussion to gain a deeper appreciation of the history and ongoing importance of tea in African American communities.

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About Xavier University of Louisiana

On the cusp of celebrating its first 100 years of service, Xavier University of Louisiana remains America’s only historically Black and Catholic University and is ranked among the top HBCUs (historically Black colleges and universities) in the nation. Recognized as a national leader in STEM and health sciences, Xavier has historically produced more African American students who graduate from medical schools each year than any other university in the United States. Additionally, Xavier’s College of Pharmacy is among the country’s top producers of African American pharmacists.

Established almost a century ago in 1925 by Saint Katharine Drexel and the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament as a place for African Americans and Native Americans to receive a quality education, Xavier has since expanded its programs in nearly every industry, including the arts, sciences, business, education, pharmacy, and political science. More recent additions in STEM-based master’s programs and undergraduate options in robotics, bioinformatics, engineering, data science, neuroscience, and genetics, have provided Xavier students (3,181students) an unbeatable experience of traditional classroom study, hands-on research, service-learning opportunities, and life experiences. Xavier students collaborate with world-renowned faculty and experts in their fields to produce award-winning research and notable work. The winning Xavier formula provides students with a well-balanced curriculum and an environment that nurtures their intellect and feeds their souls, developing all who choose to learn at the institution into the next generation of leaders and agents of positive change. Blessed with a mission to promote a more just and humane society, Xavier is leading the way to a brighter future for all. For more information about Xavier University of Louisiana, visit www.XULA.edu or contact the Marketing and Communications Department at (504) 520-5214 or XULANews@XULA.edu.