



***Legacies of San Juan Hill* Digital Hub Launches**

Collaboration between Lincoln Center, Center for Puerto Rican Studies at Hunter College (CENTRO), and Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture

**Project Honors and Explores Vibrant Manhattan Neighborhood
that Existed Prior to “Urban Renewal” Program that
Built Lincoln Center and Other Projects**

NEW YORK, NY – (February 13, 2023) – Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts (LCPA) today announced the launch of a digital hub that explores the diverse and vibrant Manhattan neighborhoods that existed prior to its construction in the 1950s: [*Legacies of San Juan Hill*](#).

The project is one piece of an ongoing commitment to confront injustices in its founding history and uplift the stories of the people who lived in the neighborhood, as well as the arts and culture that flourished there.

A resource that will grow over time, today’s launch includes 12 features—scholarly essays, interviews with former residents, archival photography and audio, video, an interactive map, and more.

“Interrogating accepted historical narratives and injustices around our founding is core to our commitment to building a more just and equitable future for the arts and for New York City. From our commissions with Etienne Charles, Nina Chanel Abney, and Jacolby Satterwhite that opened David Geffen Hall this fall to *Legacies of San Juan Hill* and much more to come in the future, our commitment here is deep and ongoing,” said **Leah C. Johnson, Executive Vice President of Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts**. “Personally, even as a life-long New Yorker, I did not know much about this area’s history, despite having recently discovered my grandmother lived here. For generations of New Yorkers, as well as artists and history buffs around the world, it is incumbent upon us to lift up the communities that came before us.”

Legacies of San Juan Hill explores the ethnically diverse and largely working-class Manhattan neighborhoods that existed in and around the area where Lincoln Center was built in the 1950s and 1960s. San Juan Hill and the broader Lincoln Square area was home to New York City’s largest Black population at the turn of the century and later a significant Puerto Rican community. A huge swath of the area was razed in the 1950s as part of the Lincoln Square Development Plan,

displacing more than 7,000 families and 800 businesses. One of many “urban renewal” programs across the country, the Plan replaced existing residential and commercial buildings with a series of superblocks and other developments, including Fordham University, Lincoln Towers, and Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts.

This website was created in collaboration with a diverse set of contributors and its project partners include the Center for Puerto Rican Studies at Hunter College (CENTRO) and the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture. Lead support is provided by the Stavros Niarchos Foundation (SNF). It is a platform for exploring the history, communities, and cultural legacy of San Juan Hill and its impact on the wider Lincoln Square neighborhood and beyond. It is a resource that will grow over time. The site will include images, essays and articles, maps, archival content, and more, all of which will offer insight into the complex history of the area and its culture. It will uplift the stories of the people who lived here, worked here, and created here, as well as those who live here now.

“We are so proud to be working alongside brilliant partners, historians, and artists as we honor and celebrate those who came before us and engage with injustices in our founding history,” said **Henry Timms, President and CEO of Lincoln Center**. “We are just getting started. We’re grateful to CENTRO and the Schomburg Center for bringing their expertise to this ongoing effort and to the Stavros Niarchos Foundation for their support.”

“San Juan Hill was a vibrant community essential to the fabric of New York City’s history and culture. It is imperative that institutions seen as pillars of arts and culture in New York, like Lincoln Center, reckon with their fraught origins. The displacement of nearly 7,000 families and 800 business from San Juan Hill, which deeply affected African American and Puerto Rican communities, cannot be reversed but projects like *Legacies of San Juan Hill* can serve to uplift the folks who once called it home. CENTRO is thrilled to be sharing our resources on this project and we are incredibly eager to illuminate this dynamic community and its undeniable impact on NYC in partnership with Lincoln Center and the Schomburg Center,” said **Yarimar Bonilla, Director of CENTRO**.

“The enduring call and response between generations of people of African descent is visible throughout the *Legacies of San Juan Hill*, a project that will enrich our knowledge about the stories, presence, and cultures of Black and Brown people,” says **Joy L. Bivins, Director of the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture**. “Our institution’s namesake, Arturo Alfonso Schomburg, lived in San Juan Hill in the 1890s and dedicated his life to unearthing and sharing the richness of African Diasporic culture, wherever it existed, and we continue to celebrate his vision today.”

“Lincoln Center and its partners have given us a wonderfully rich resource for exploring the buried past of this lost neighborhood that will be of great use to educators and should be of particular interest to anyone wanting to know more about the history of New York City,” said **Peter-Christian Aigner, Ph.D., Director of The Gotham Center for New York City History**

T.S. Monk, son of musician and San Juan Hill resident Thelonious Monk said, "I think it is a marvelous move to engage the community and engage the connection between San Juan Hill and Lincoln Center."

"As both an act of reckoning with a history of displacement and erasure, and an effort to uplift and celebrate the rich community that once thrived in San Juan Hill, we applaud this partnership between Lincoln Center, CENTRO, and the Schomburg Center," said **Cultural Affairs Commissioner Laurie Cumbo**. "*The Legacies of San Juan Hill* is a significant step toward uncovering and examining the history of the area surrounding the Lincoln Center campus and we look forward to joining as the partnership continues to develop."

"San Juan Hill's history is rich but often forgotten. The creation of this exciting new partnership between Lincoln Center, CENTRO, and the Schomburg Center will ensure San Juan Hill's legacy won't be lost to time," said **Manhattan Borough President Mark Levine**. "A century ago, San Juan Hill was a vibrant, diverse neighborhood, and it takes an active effort like this to unearth and honor that history. I'm grateful to the former residents, scholars, and artists who are bringing San Juan Hill back to Manhattan."

"Congratulations to Lincoln Center for focusing attention on San Juan Hill through murals, music, and expression. I remember meeting older residents of Amsterdam Houses who had been displaced from San Juan Hill. It was a unique neighborhood that included many famous African American and Puerto Rican musicians, writers, and historians who moved to Harlem or the nearby NYCHA development when the buildings were torn down to make way for Lincoln Center. It is important that this rich history is being captured and highlighted by Lincoln Center for New Yorkers to reflect and remember," said **New York City Council Member Gale Brewer**.

"This project, *Legacies of San Juan Hill*, at Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, acknowledges and elevates a rich and vibrant community of thousands of families and businesses that had been systematically erased from the area around Lincoln Center," said **New York State Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins**. "Too often, people and communities of color are casualties in development. This project works to defy that practice by centering the community of San Juan Hill and its diverse residents, and in doing so, it allows for its legacy to be remembered and expanded upon. As someone born in this neighborhood in the Amsterdam Houses, the continued telling of our stories is personal to me. I was honored to attend another exploration of this history, Etienne Charles' *San Juan Hill: A New York Story*, and I commend the Center for Puerto Rican Studies at Hunter College and the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture for their work to preserve the culture and history of this neighborhood."

State Senator Brad Hoylman Sigal said, "The story of San Juan Hill is one of a thriving neighborhood destroyed by racial insensitivity and top-down urban planning that ignores community needs. I applaud the Center for Puerto Rican Studies at Hunter College (CENTRO), the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, and Lincoln Center, which sits on land that once comprised the area of San Juan Hill, for taking on this important project. I hope this living resource will succeed in uplifting the stories of former residents so that we never again ignore and displace the disempowered and marginalized in our city."

"Thousands of San Juan Hill residents and businesses were forcefully displaced from their homes and community years ago by Robert Moses to make way for Lincoln Center," **said Assemblymember Linda B. Rosenthal (D/WF-Manhattan)**. "As a result, decades of history and culture were literally paved over, erasing an entire neighborhood and its members from history. Those injustices are finally being confronted and the forgotten people and their contributions to society are being given the attention they rightfully deserve. Lincoln Center's imaginative interactive history of the San Juan Hill community is a meaningful tribute to its legacy. We have much to learn and appreciate about our collective past, and I am grateful that Lincoln Center has taken the steps to ensure the lasting legacy of San Juan Hill."

In addition to the launch content noted in detail below, future commissions include ***Buffalo Sonnet: A digital comic book about San Juan Hill* by Kamau Ware**, historian, artist, and founder of the Black Gotham Experience to debut in Spring 2023; an essay that traces the lives and legacies of Thelonious Monk and Nina Simone in the San Juan Hill and Lincoln Square neighborhoods by **Lincoln Center archivist, Al Bland**; an essay by **Ron Scott, journalist at the *Amsterdam News***, on the history of the paper and its connection to the area; and a profile of San Juan Hill resident James Reese Europe, founder of the influential Clef Club, by **former director of the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Howard Dodson**.

A series of talks, performances, and interactive events deeply exploring and contextualizing the history of San Juan Hill will occur later this spring. Discussions will explore the origins of the neighborhood at the turn of the 20th century and its earliest trailblazers; the contributions of Black Jazz and musical theater artists in San Juan Hill's theaters, clubs, and dance halls; and Puerto Rican migration to the Lincoln Square area and the musical influences that thrived there. **Sydnie L. Mosley Dances' *PURPLE: A Ritual in Nine Spells***, a work created in community with senior residents of NYCHA's neighboring Amsterdam Houses, will have its Lincoln Center debut in June 2023 in association with Gibney Presents. Residents will be featured in an accompanying multimedia lobby installation: *What does PURPLE sound like?*

Several years in the making, this project is part of a wide body of work at Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts that confronts injustices in its founding history and uplifts the stories of the people who lived in and around San Juan Hill, as well as the arts and culture that flourished there.

On view now are Nina Chanel Abney's *San Juan Heal* on the north façade of David Geffen Hall and Jacolby Satterwhite's *An Eclectic Dance to the Music of Time* on the Hauser Digital Wall in David Geffen Hall, both commissioned by Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts in collaboration with Public Art Fund and Studio Museum in Harlem. A mural by Gary "Wicked" Fritz, commissioned by Etienne Charles and originally installed in Brooklyn, is on view at 62nd Street and Amsterdam Avenue. The world premiere of Etienne Charles's *San Juan Hill: A New York Story* opened the new David Geffen Hall in October 2022, accompanied by a series of talks, performances, and interactive events that contextualized the history of San Juan Hill.

[Imagery and videos may be accessed here.](#)

[Legacies of San Juan Hill](#)

February 2023 Launch

- [A History of the Black Community in San Juan Hill: 1900–1915](#)

Marcy Sacks writes about the historical factors that contributed to the origin and evolution of the Black community in San Juan Hill, as well as the defining characteristics of daily life.

Marcy S. Sacks is the chair and Julian S. Rammelkamp Professor of History at Albion College (MI). She has published two books, including [Before Harlem: The Black Experience in New York City before World War I](#), in addition to a number of articles and blog posts on Black history.

- [San Juan Hill and the Black Music Revolution](#)

Seton Hawkins writes about a revolution in popular music that was driven by the Black artists of San Juan Hill. The essay delves into a fascinating piece of music history, with an emphasis on the evolution of Jazz and little-known facts about some of its greatest contributors.

Seton Hawkins serves as Director of Public Programs and Education Resources at Jazz at Lincoln Center.

- [Video interview with T.S. Monk](#)

T.S. Monk, drummer and son of Thelonious Monk, recalls San Juan Hill as a diverse community that was home to many iconic artists. In a recent interview conducted in December 2022 T.S. Monk recounts what San Juan Hill was like in the 1950s and reflects on growing up in the neighborhood, his father's musical legacy, and what made San Juan Hill a special place.

- [San Juan Hill and the Black Nurses of the Stillman Settlement](#)

Some parts of New York, such as Harlem, are well-known Black neighborhoods, but Black people have lived in and impacted all parts of New York City for centuries. In this essay, Rhonda Evans explores one of the many lesser-known areas of New York City where Black New Yorkers have lived and thrived, starting circa 1900 in an area then known as San Juan Hill. Her essay shines a light on the Black nurses who worked in the Stillman Settlement of San Juan Hill, providing healthcare and social services.

Rhonda Evans is Assistant Chief Librarian at the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture.

- [Daily Life in San Juan Hill: A Photo Essay](#)

With archival photos sourced from New York Public Library, Museum of the City of New York, and New York City Parks and Municipal Archives, these snapshots offer a window into the lives of the residents of San Juan Hill around the first half of the 20th century.

- [Historical Landmarks in San Juan Hill: An Interactive Map](#)

With archival photos sourced from New York Public Library, Museum of the City of New York, and New-York Historical Society, this feature explores San Juan Hill through the historical landmarks that tell the story of a socially diverse and culturally vibrant neighborhood. Encompassing theaters, schools, businesses, and other public spaces, this interactive map bring history to life block by block.

- [Seeing Lincoln Square](#)

Samuel Zipp writes an essay on the urban history of Lincoln Square in the mid-20th century. The piece paints a vivid portrait of the neighborhood, including detail about the types of businesses, the occupations of the residents, the ethnic makeup of the area, and the dynamics of a diverse, mixed-use, mixed-class area. The essay also offers a concise overview of the Lincoln Square Development Plan and the issues associated with it—race and class, “slum” clearance and displacement, neighborhood resistance, and more.

Samuel Zipp is a writer, historian, and Professor of American Studies and Urban Studies at Brown University. He is the author of [The Idealist: Wendell Willkie’s Wartime Quest to Build One World](#). This essay expands upon his research on the history of urbanism in New York City, published in [Manhattan Projects: The Rise and Fall of Urban Renewal in Cold War New York](#) and [Vital Little Plans: The Short Works of Jane Jacobs](#).

- [Interviews: Life in the Neighborhood](#)

A series of vignettes on life in San Juan Hill, in the words of former residents. These short videos, drawn from interview footage taken in the 1980s and now part of the New York Municipal Archives, will talk about what daily life was like in the neighborhood, its importance to Black history, and the musical legacy of the area.

In 1985, New York City’s municipal broadcast television station WNYC-TV produced [Neighborhood Voices](#), a limited series on unique and changing city neighborhoods.

- [Displacement and Survival in Puerto Rican New York: Broken Promises in Lincoln Square](#)

Lorrin Thomas writes an essay on housing policies affecting the Puerto Rican community of San Juan Hill and Lincoln Square and the grassroots advocacy that surfaced in response. The piece outlines the conditions that created a housing crisis for Puerto Rican New Yorkers in the mid-20th century. It also connects the legacy of housing practices at that time to the issues affecting Puerto Rican communities in the South Bronx in the 1980s and today.

Lorrin Thomas is an associate professor of history at Rutgers University-Camden. She is the author of two books, [Puerto Rican Citizen: History and Political Identity in Twentieth Century New York City](#) (University of Chicago Press, 2010) and, with Aldo Lauria Santiago, [Rethinking the Struggle for Puerto Rican Rights](#) (Routledge, 2018).

- [**From San Juan to San Juan Hill: The Experiences of Arturo Alfonso Schomburg \(1874-1938\) and Rogelio Ramirez \(1913-1994\)**](#)

Bobby Sanabria and Elena Martínez co-author an essay on archivist Arturo Schomburg and musician Rogelio “Ram” Ramirez that focuses on their lives in San Juan Hill, their artistic contributions, and the larger story of Puerto Rican cultural influence in New York City in the first half of the 20th century. The piece also explores how, through history, these two iconic figures have become closely associated with the African American community while their Puerto Rican heritage and connections have been lesser known in the public consciousness.

Bobby Sanabria is a Latin Jazz musician and seven-time Grammy nominee. Elena Martínez’s work spans historical essays, documentaries, and exhibitions. Her projects include co-producing “From Mambo to Hip Hop: A South Bronx Tale” and curating “¡Que bonita bandera!: The Puerto Rican Flag as Folk Art.” They are co-artistic directors of the Bronx Music Heritage Center.

- [**New York's Dance of Displacement**](#)

Aurora Flores-Hostos writes about the music and culture of the Puerto Rican community of San Juan Hill, which flourished amid years of displacement and struggle for empowerment in New York City.

Aurora Flores-Hostos is a composer, writer, producer, and educator, as well as the creator of the "100 Years of Latin Music in New York" podcast with co-host Anani Centeno. A published author and journalist, she became the first female music correspondent for Billboard Magazine, while still attending Columbia University.

About Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts

Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts (LCPA) is a cultural and civic cornerstone of New York City. The primary advocate for the entire Lincoln Center campus, our strategic priorities include: fostering collaboration and deepening impact across the Lincoln Center resident organizations; championing inclusion and increasing the accessibility and reach of Lincoln Center’s work; and nurturing innovation on stage and off to help ensure the arts are at the center of civic life for all. LCPA presents hundreds of programs each year, offered primarily for free and choose-what-you-pay, including many specially designed for young audiences, families, and those with disabilities.

About Center for Puerto Rican Studies at Hunter College (CENTRO)

Founded in 1973 by a coalition of students, faculty, and activists, the Center for Puerto Rican Studies at Hunter College (CENTRO) is the largest university-based research institute, library, and archive dedicated to the Puerto Rican experience in the United States. We provide support to students, scholars, artists, and members of the community at large across and beyond New York. We produce original research, films, books, and educational tools and are the home of The Centro Journal—the premiere academic journal of Puerto Rican Studies. Our aim is to create actionable

and accessible scholarship to strengthen, broaden, and reimagine the field of Puerto Rican studies.

About Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture

The Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture in Harlem, one of The New York Public Library's renowned research libraries, is a world-leading cultural institution devoted to the research, preservation, and exhibition of materials focused on African American, African Diaspora, and African experiences.

Legacies of San Juan Hill is presented by Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts in collaboration with CENTRO, The Center for Puerto Rican Studies at Hunter College and the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture

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