



AAAM Reflects on the African American Experience

By Samuel W. Black
President

As I read, watched, and listened to events over the past few years, culminating in the social demonstrations in Ferguson, I felt as many of you likely did- torn. As a Black museum professional and President of the Association of African American Museums (AAAM), I felt that the organization should respond – especially in light of our 2015 Annual Conference theme. I posted a message on our website and other social media outlets that went viral in the museum field. That message called for AAAM members to contextualize their ongoing work in light of Ferguson and other social issues impacting African American life. I am fully aware that for Black museums, this type of contextualization, in exhibition, programming, research, education and outreach has always been a cornerstone of our missions. Many of our institutions were born of the Black Arts Movement and the push for greater inclusion of Black history in the nation’s education systems.

In light of Ferguson, I am reminded of the exhibit and programming of the Cincinnati Museum Center after the 2001 civil demonstrations following the killing of 19 year old Timothy Thomas by a Cincinnati Police officer. The Museum Center mounted an exhibition that looked at the history of riots in Cincinnati, the Black community, and police relations. Thirteen years later, Ferguson extends beyond the killing of Michael Brown but encapsulates the deaths of Trayvon Martin, Jonny Gammage, Eric Garner and others. Now is the perfect opportunity to



communicate to our museum constituents that AAAM has taken a leadership position in addressing America's social problems.

From August 4-7, 2015, the AAAM Annual Conference will be in Memphis, TN, hosted by the National Civil Rights Museum (NCRM). The theme for 2015 captures the spirit of the past, present, and future of the Black experience, "Milestones in History: African American Museums and the Story of African American Progress." It is clearly appropriate for this gathering to take place at the NCRM in Memphis, a place that marks many evocative moments of our shared past. Panels, plenary sessions, and presentations will highlight the conference theme, and allow AAAM members to answer the call issued in my Ferguson message. In addition to the conference sessions, AAAM welcomes the keynote address by Dr. Hasan Kwame Jeffries, associate professor of history at The Ohio State University and author of the book, *Bloody Lowndes: Civil Rights and Black Power in Alabama's Black Belt*. A full slate of cultural activities sponsored by the Withers Museum and Gallery; Stax Museum; and the NCRM will offer the chance to see the work of your colleagues and network with fellow AAAM members. The Conference will give AAAM an opportunity to extend a warm welcome to Terri Lee Freeman, the new president of the NCRM. We thank Ms. Freeman for her continued support of AAAM and leadership of a magnificent museum.

In 2015, AAAM looks forward to a growing collaboration with the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of African American History and Culture (NMAAHC) and the Southeastern Museum Coalition (SEMC) around the Jekyll Island Museum Management



Institute (JIMI). The NMAAHC sponsors the John Kinard fellowship award for an AAAM member to attend the JIMI. The 2015 recipients of the John Kinard Fellowship were **Chieko T. Phillips, Community Engagement Manager, Northwest African American Museum,** and **Dr. Ruth M. Jackson, University of California at Riverside.** Dr. Jackson expressed that the JIMI was, “a very rewarding experience with an outstanding cadre of faculty and an extraordinary mixture of classmates representing curators or directors of museums of various sizes and types, ranging from house, military, science, and other types of museums, large and small.” AAAM’s collaboration with SEMC will also allow SEMC members to register for the AAAM Conference at a discounted rate.

The 2015 nominating committee has put together a slate of candidates for 5 at-large board positions and the vice president post. Our members will be counted upon to elect candidates who will contribute to the growth and mission of the organization. Ballots will be distributed this Spring to current members. The newly elected board members will be introduced at the annual business meeting in Memphis.

Finally, the fund-development campaign will continue with the next phase of our plan to secure funding for operating and administration costs. As we look forward to our conferences in Riverside, California in 2016, and Washington, DC in 2017, we are poised to expand into new territories as we travel to the west coast and back over the next two years. Each conference will embrace new horizons, welcome west coast members, and extend AAAM’s reach beyond the east coast into the larger African Diaspora.