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Libraries' Fall Exhibition Focuses on Black Utopias

Syracuse University Libraries' fall exhibition, "Black Utopias," will open on Thursday, Oct. 8, in the Special Collections gallery on Bird Library's sixth floor. An opening reception will be held on Oct. 15 from 5-7 p.m. The show will run through Friday, April 15, 2016.

Co-curated by Lucy Mulrone, interim senior director of the Special Collections Research Center, and Joan Bryant, associate professor in the African American studies department, the exhibition commemorates the 50th anniversary of the publication of "The Autobiography of Malcolm X," the best-selling narrative of one of the most prominent men of the Civil Rights era.

This anniversary holds special significance for Syracuse University because the libraries are home to the records of Grove Press, the avant-garde publisher of the "Autobiography." Grove hailed the book as one of its "most important" publications. The first printing of 10,000 copies sold out even before it was released in October 1965.

"Black Utopias" takes the personal transformations that form the narrative arc of Malcolm X's "Autobiography" as the framework for exploring a range of utopian visions that have shaped black American life. Although utopias are, by definition, the stuff of dreams, the examples presented in this exhibition are firmly rooted in historical experiences of subjugation, inequality and injustice. They are at once visionary and modest endeavors to craft worlds of freedom, unity, power, equality and beauty.

The exhibit will feature the handwritten letter that Malcolm X sent to Alex Haley during his pilgrimage to Mecca, as well as other unique and rare materials from the collections. It includes documents by little-known individuals and such prominent figures as W.E.B. Dubois, Langston Hughes, Madama C.J. Walker, James Ford and Martin Luther King Jr.

Other events associated with the exhibition include an exhibition tour and brown bag discussion with the curators on Friday, Oct. 23, from noon-1:30 p.m. and marathon community readings of "The Autobiography of Malcolm X" for Banned Books Week on Sept. 29 from 2:30-6:30 p.m. in the Peter Graham Scholarly Commons in Bird Library; on Sept. 30 from 11 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. in Coulter Library at Onondaga Community College; and on Oct. 1 from 5-7 p.m. at Beauchamp Branch Library, 2111 S. Salina St. in Syracuse.

For more information, contact scrc@syr.edu or call 315.443.2697.