

# PRAISESINGER NEWSLETTER



SAN FRANCISCO

AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL SOCIETY

WINTER 2024

## SAN FRANCISCO AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORICAL & CULTURAL SOCIETY

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Eldoris Cameron & Ginger  
Smyly, Co-editors

Al Williams, President  
William Hoskins, Executive  
Director

Photos: E. Cameron, G.  
Smyly

The 2024 Annual Black History Month kick-off, held on Friday, February 2nd at City Hall Rotunda, was another success for the Society! If you were not there, [view](#) the program.

Preliminaries included a welcome by the Society President Al Williams, the invocation delivered by Rev. Sonya Brunswick, Greater Life Church and dedication of Black History Month to the late artist, Hilda Robinson, by Ginger Smyly, Society member. Following “Lift Every Voice and Sing,” led by the Louis “Paisley” Hinton Duo, Mayor London Breed gave greetings and remarked on the wealth of African American talent managing San Francisco’s government. After a second selection by the Hinton Duo, Ralph Remington, Director of Cultural Affairs for the City and County of San Francisco, gave the keynote speech.



*Mayor Breed*



*Ralph Remington*



Using the 2024 theme, “African Americans and the Arts,” Remington noted the brilliance, depth and breadth of the arts created and practiced by African Americans, despite, in spite, or just because, invoking the names of the greats of the past and present. His words inspired and provoked awesome respect.

Thanks to the planning committee led by Al Williams, the Society’s partners in the Mayor’s Office, the sponsors of Black History Month and the Society, volunteers who greeted attendees and set up an information desk. Now is the time to start working on Black History Month 2025!

**African American  
Citywide Historic  
Context Statement**

At its meeting on February 21, 2024, the San Francisco Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) unanimously approved the “African American Citywide Historic Context Statement.” Originally drafted in 2013, it was revised upon extensive review and comment by Society members and the public. The adopted version reflects the Society’s input and addition public input obtained during community outreach efforts of the San Francisco Planning Department

The excellent “Forward” to the adopted Context Statement was written by Society member Carl Williams on behalf of the Society. Carl Williams, his wife Jane and I attended the Historic Preservation Commission meeting. He and I spoke briefly in support of the Commission’s motion to adopt the Context Statement. We reminded the Commission and the public that the Context Statement is not the definitive history of African Americans in San Francisco. In response, the Commission confirmed that the Context Statement is a “living” document that will continue to be updated as additional information about the African American presence becomes available. The Commission requested that DCP staff provide periodic updates on the implementation of the Context Statement.

The Society will continue to monitor the implementation and application of the Context Statement in accordance with the Society Board’s resolution in support of the Context Statement.

The Board’s resolution reads in part states:

“RESOLVED, that the Society’s President is authorized to engage with the appropriate agencies and departments of the City and County of San Francisco to devise plans and methodologies to facilitate and assure the Society’s continuing role, participation and involvement in the implementation of the Context Statement.”

To fulfill this responsibility will require the active participation of Society members. The first step should be an internal review and discussion of this very long [document](#) and the establishment of a committee to coordinate the Society’s on-going efforts in this regard.

- *Al Williams,  
President*

The Society is indebted to all of those members who participated in the review and comment on the original draft. This was a monumental effort and vital contribution to the accurate documentation of the historic contributions African Americans have made to the growth and development of the City and County of San Francisco.

**IN THIS ISSUE OF  
THE PRAISESINGER**

- ✓ Black History Month 2024: “African Americans and The Arts”
- ✓ Society President: “African American Historical Context Statement”
- ✓ Arthur Lathan and DeYonne Lathan-Lee Commemorative Benches
- ✓ Book Club: Reclamation: Sally Hemings, Thomas Jefferson, and a Descendant's Search for Her Family's Lasting Legacy, March 19<sup>th</sup> 6 pm [register](#)
- ✓ Executive Director: “Sargent Claude Johnson,” the exhibit
- ✓ From the Archives: A Homage, The Society and The Arts
- ✓ African American Arts Organizations
- ✓ Special Report: Are African Americans Subsidizing Whites’ Retirement?
- ✓ Events, Exhibits
- ✓ Photo album: BHM Kick-off, MLK, and more

**BOOK CLUB**

Register now for a discussion of Reclamation: Sally Hemings, Thomas Jefferson, and a Descendant's Search for Her Family's Lasting Legacy, by Gayle Jessup White, March 19<sup>th</sup> 6 pm [register](#) ZOOM only. You will receive a link for the meeting after registration.

- *Program  
Committee*

Thanks to Shawna Sherman, Manager of the African American Center, SF Public Library for co-sponsoring the African American Legacy Book Club.

**SARGENT JOHNSON  
EXHIBIT AND MORE**

The Society takes pride in being guardian to several important Sargent Johnson pieces of art. Johnson was actively creating art in the Bay Area from 1915 to 1967 upon his death. Exhibits at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, the Oakland Museum of California and elsewhere throughout the 1990s included some of the pieces owned by the Society. These precious items have been in storage, still in their boxes as returned by the SF MOMA. In 2017 and 2023 the works were reviewed and readied for an eventual move to secure storage.

In 2023, upon request of the Huntington Library and Gardens, several pieces were photographed for inclusion in an exhibition book, and three pieces have been loaned to the Huntington for their exhibit “Sargent Claude Johnson,” featuring 43 works, spanning the breadth of his lifetime as an artist. The exhibit opened on February 17 and continues until May 20, 2024. The website provides a virtual experience. [View exhibit information.](#)

[Register](#) for digital library talk on Sargent Johnson with Jacqueline Francis, author and Ginger Smyly, Society Board member, February 29 at 6 pm. (SF Public Library)

Look for more on Sargent Johnson in this edition of the *Praisesinger*, our [website](#) and emails in the near future.

A BLACK HISTORY MONTH SUPER EVENT - SARGENT JOHNSON AT THE HUNTINGTON

On Thursday, February 15, 2024, the reception for the opening of the Sargent Claude Johnson exhibit was held in the Marylou and George Boone Gallery. The exhibition included 43 works chosen from the Huntington’s Sargent Johnson collection and from private collectors and organizations, including three pieces from the Society. The exhibit site is part of the Huntington Library, Art Museum and Botanical Gardens which occupies 207 acres in Pasadena, CA. The art museum, the gardens and library are all world class, providing an ongoing feast for the senses and intellect.

The reception was held outdoors at the gallery entrance under a dome of huge brightly lit round lanterns and large heating lamps. Serving stations and bars were conveniently located throughout the designated area along with a cadre of waiters and servers. The serving included beautifully created trays of petit fours of salmon, duck cheese, meats and desserts. The guests were friendly, a wonderful blend of art lovers excited by the prospect of being the first to see the new exhibit.

The exhibit was spectacular in so many ways, occupying five large and smaller chambers in the gallery. The entrance was graced by the spotlighted “Mother and Child” and the “Forever Free” statues. To the left were a collection of five beautifully executed copper and painted African masks; across from a chamber on the other side of the entrance area, were housed five spectacularly lit heads reflecting an array of subtle colors. The next large chamber was totally devoted to an architectural installation created for the auditorium of the California School for the Blind in Berkeley, displaying his mastery of wood carving and gilding. The next chamber held a wall-size rolling projection of his 185-foot cast stone bas-relief of the athletic mural done at George Washington High School. The remaining chambers and display cases contain an incredible array of his statues, carvings and paintings. The exhibit is a true manifestation of the diversity of skills and incredible talent of an African American artist. An artist yet to be fully recognized for the contributions that he made during his creative years, a very challenging time for Black artists, 1888 - 1967.

Special kudos for the beautiful Sargent Claude Johnson art book edited for the exhibit by Dennis Carr, John P. Bowles and our own Jacqueline Francis for the exhibit. A copy is available for viewing at the Society.



- William Hoskins, Executive Director

URGENT MESSAGE: VOTE before or on March 5<sup>th</sup> in the California Primary

Every year, Black History Month encourages each of us to reflect on and learn from the past while working on a more promising future. This year we have experienced a direct assault on our voting rights. In 2023 more restrictive voting bills were introduced than in 2022 which, in turn

represented more anti-voter bills having been introduced than in 2021.

As we move closer to the local and presidential elections in 2024 the systematic effort to discourage voters is escalating. This systematic effort to disenfranchise minority voters by introducing unnecessary voter identification laws, early voting restrictions, limiting drop boxes, limiting mail-in ballots, and absentee voting. There are other variables: such as mis- and disinformation and the influence of special interest groups, which can and will adversely influence the election outcome. You have the power to make a difference, **Vote** before or on March 5<sup>th</sup> in the California Primary.

**ARTHUR CORTEZ  
LATHAN &  
DEYONNE LATHAN-LEE**

**COMMEMORATIVE  
BENCH DEDICATION**



*Bench dedicated to Arthur Lathan, more photos in album*

**Dorothy Lathan**, longtime Society Member, dedicated Commemorative Benches on the Great Highway Path in San Francisco on January 19<sup>th</sup> in honor and loving memory of Arthur Cortez Lathan, husband, and DeYonne Lathan-Lee, daughter. Both loved ones passed during the Covid shut-down.

Dorothy and Arthur were married almost 70 years, residing in their home in front of the path that they walked for nearly 62 years as homeowners there.

Mayor London Breed with Lathan’s district supervisor and city park officials gathered with family and friends to dedicate the benches. Arthur Lathan’s bench is located at the Great Highway Path across from 2140 Great Highway Street. DeYonne Lathan-Lee’s bench is located the next block going north on the Great Highway Path.

Mr. Lathan was a proud graduate of Lincoln University, MO, who earned a Master’s Degree at UC Berkeley, was Affirmative Action Officer at SF State University, served as president of the NAACP that lead the demonstrations against downtown hotels in the 1960’s, served on several boards including the Society and the Lorraine Hansberry Theatre.

The Society’s mission has continued because of Arthur’s commitment as a member, past Board Member and because of his activism in Civil Rights.

May the benches that you can rest on during your walk keep his memory and life alive in San Francisco.

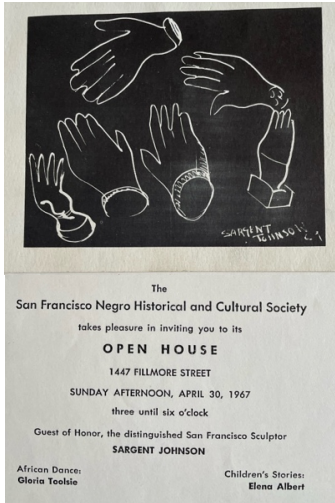
- *Eldoris Cameron*

**BAYVIEW HUNTER’S  
POINT LEGACY  
FOUNDATION  
SCHOLARSHIPS**

Apply now for scholarships for students seeking post-secondary education goals from the Bayview Hunter’s Point Legacy Foundation. Students must be a Bayview resident, meet family income requirements and grade average between 2.5 and 3.5. Starting March 15 – April 29. [See website.](#)

FROM THE ARCHIVES

HOMAGE: THE SOCIETY AND THE ARTS



*Invitation to Society Open House, honoring Sargent Johnson*

“In celebrating the entire history of African Americans and the arts, the ASALH puts into the national spotlight the richness of the past and present with an eye towards what the rest of the twenty-first century will bring.” (ASALH)

The 2024 Black History Month theme, “African Americans and the Arts,” condenses 400 years of cultural development, starting with African artistry of crafting, adornment, dance, music and oral history. African Americans created and create, drawing on the past and speculating about the future; they blended and blend, graft, re-mix sounds, sights and movements of the block, the church, the club with that of European performance halls and early American influences, then cross-fertilize with the arts from the Diaspora.

Aside from rarified rooms, the Society was the leading San Francisco forum for African American and Diaspora arts. From its inception, the Society presented the arts and artists, nationally known and local notability, in exhibits, concerts and educational forums. Some of the nationally known guests included:

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <b>Roland Hayes</b> , February 17, 1963   | <b>Paul Robeson</b> , June 13, 1967                  |
| <b>Sargent Johnson</b> , April 30, 1967   | <b>Alex Hailey</b> , June 19, 1977                   |
| <b>James Baldwin</b> , May 6, 1979  | <b>Gwendolyn Brooks</b> , 1980                       |
| <b>Fisk Jubilee Singers</b> , February 9, 1975, March 9, 1983 and March 5, 1986 | <b>Leronne Bennett, Jr.</b> , September 21, 1981     |
| <b>Boys Choir of Harlem</b> , December 8, 1990                                  | <b>George Duke with John Handy</b> , August 24, 1997 |

**Montford Cardwell**, (whose “Jesse Owens” graces the Society premises,) **William Grant Still**, **James Smalley**, **William Allen Duncan**, **Dolores Cayou** and the **Watumbe Dancers**, **Nathaniel Sirles**, **devorah majors**, **Hilda Robinson**, **David Johnson**, and many other local artists were presented; some served on the Board or as staff.

The peculiar obstacles for artists of color persist, but there are far more opportunities than ever. The Society is proud of its rich heritage of supporting and presenting the arts, serving as incubator and mid-wife.

After visiting the Society, the late artist, Carlos Martinez, created the mural, “Twentieth Century,” highlighting African American history and art. Now, the Society looks toward the quintessential expression of “Twenty-First Century” African American history and art.

- *Ginger Smyly*

**“AFRICAN AMERICANS & THE ARTS IN SAN FRANCISCO”**

Today, there are African American theater companies, Black-owned art galleries and fine arts and crafts people, dance and music groups and artists that teach and perform. The Society is proud to highlight a few of these groups:

**AFRICAN AMERICAN ART & CULTURE COMPLEX**

On September 21, 1991, the Center for African American Art and Culture was inaugurated at 762 Fulton St. The name has changed several times. In 1991, the San Francisco African American Historical and Cultural Society and the Wajumbe Cultural Institution were the principal organizations. The mission is dedicated to Afrocentric culture, traditions and values. An active community arts program is ongoing.

**AFRICAN AMERICAN SHAKESPEARE COMPANY**

The company was founded in 1994. Sherri Young has served as Executive Director since 2009. Peter Callender is the Artistic Director. Each season, four plays, at least one from the Shakespearean tradition, are presented. “PIPELINE,” plays March 1 – 31 at the Taube Atrium Theater.

**BAYVIEW OPERA HOUSE RUTH WILLIAMS MEMORIAL THEATRE**

Located at 4705 – 3<sup>rd</sup> Street, the Opera House hosts a variety of entertainment and cultural programs in the Bayview-Hunters Point district. Named for the late Ruth Williams, playwright and actress, known for “launching careers of singer Cindy Herron (EnVogue) and Danny Glover.” Ruth Williams was credited for saving the Opera House before her passing in 1995.

**MUSEUM OF THE AFRICAN DIASPORA – MOAD**

Opened to the public in 2005, MOAD’s mission focuses on cultural influences of Africans worldwide, presenting art, history, and the culture of people of African descent. The community submitted photos as part of a mural that lines the stairs at the museum entrance. MOAD hosts exhibits and educational programs and has a museum store at 685 Mission St.

**LORRAINE HANSBERRY THEATRE**

Lorraine Hansberry Theatre was launched in 1981 and continues to be an active theatrical company. Namesake, Lorraine Hansberry, wrote “A Raisin in the Sun,” and was the first female to have a play open on Broadway. Hansberry, playwright, director and activist, died at age 34, cutting off a brilliant career. Housed in the Complex, plays and readings are staged around the City.

**SFBATCO**

SFBATCO was founded in 2012. It provides live theater and a platform for people of the “Global Majority.” The performances spark social exchanges and a multitude of cultural experiences. Co-Founders are Marcelo Javier and Rodney Earl Jackson, Jr. Now celebrating 10 years!

SPECIAL REPORT:  
SUBSIDIES FOR  
WHITES' RETIREMENT  
ON THE BACKS OF  
BLACKS?

## Are African Americans subsidizing the retirement of whites?

Since 2011, the distinguished economist, university professor and author Richard D. Wolff has hosted the podcast titled "Economic Update." Wolff, describes his show as "devoted to the economic dimensions of our lives and those of our children." In his October 19, 2023 broadcast, Wolff addressed a listener's question: "Why shouldn't African Americans be allowed to start getting their Social Security without penalty at least five years earlier than white Americans, since they will statistically die more than five years sooner?"

Government figures show that in 2021, the overall life expectancy across all racial/ethnic groups in the U.S. was 76.1 years. Of this population, white people lived an average of 76.4 years, and black people 70.8 years.

Wolff said: "White people live a good deal longer than black people. It means that when you retire, around age 67, the number of years you can collect Social Security – if you're white – is more than it is if you're black. ... we all put in the same percentage of our incomes into the Social Security system... But when retirement comes, an average white person will collect \$195,500 for the rest of their lives. A black person will collect \$81,000 for the rest of their lives."

- Max Millard

"... black folks are putting more into Social Security than they get out, and white people are putting in less than they get out. So the next time someone says 'institutionalized racism' in the U.S., Social Security is one way and one place that that happens. It is an injustice, and there are among us people who know it and have various proposals to deal with it." One possible solution, he said, was "giving Social Security an amount that takes into account longevity. So that in one community you get a different amount than in another. Not just because you put in different amounts, or [because] you may have worked longer years, but because you are part of a community whose longevity is different from other parts."

*"Economic Update" is broadcast in the Bay Area on KPFA 94.1 FM each Friday at 10 am Prof. Wolff welcomes suggestions from listeners. To send a question, email his assistant Charlie Fabian at [charlie.info438@gmail.com](mailto:charlie.info438@gmail.com)*

*Search and hear podcasts of "[Economic Update](#)"*



**SOCIETY CALENDAR OF EVENTS & OTHER INFO**

Visit us at [www.sfaahcs.org](http://www.sfaahcs.org)

- ✓ Society Library & Gallery open Tuesday, Wednesday & Thursday, pm or by appointment
- ✓ "Voting," lobby of Society offices
- ✓ Digital Library: Sargent Johnson, February 29, 6 pm, [register](#)
- ✓ Genealogy Resources Workshop, SOON
- ✓ **VOTE** in California Primary, March 5
- ✓ Society Book Club via ZOOM; March 19, 6 pm

Call 415-292-6172 or [email](#) us for information

See [website](#) for events and resources

**THE SOCIETY NEEDS YOU!**

Volunteers are essential to the Society. Please consider serving on the Board, taking leadership on a committee or volunteering at the gallery. Contact Al Williams, President, at [info@sfaahcs.org](mailto:info@sfaahcs.org) or call 415-292-6172.

Get involved. Contact us at: [info@sfaahcs.org](mailto:info@sfaahcs.org)



Young students view display of 1972 Afrikan Liberation Day materials at SF Public Library, African American Ctr.

**PRAISESINGER ONLINE:**

Can't open, download or print the *Praisesinger*? Go to our [website](#), read or download the *Praisesinger* from our website. Read earlier editions of the newsletter on the site.

**MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION/RENEWAL**

(Your annual membership term is January 1 through December 31.)  
LIFE members, your donation is appreciated

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

CITY/STATE/ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

PHONE \_\_\_\_\_ CELL \_\_\_\_\_

E-MAIL ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

Please sign me up as a:

Student	\$15	Organizations	\$250
Senior	\$25	Small Business	\$350
Adult	\$50	Large Business	\$700
Family	\$10	Donor	
	0		

\*\*If you do not plan to be an active member, please make a donation

Donation: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Total: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Membership fees and contributions are tax deductible

**Make Your Check Payable/Mail To:**

**San Francisco African American Historical & Cultural Society**

762 Fulton Street, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor  
San Francisco, CA 94102  
415.292.6172

I am interested in serving on the  committee(s):

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Development         | <input type="checkbox"/> Library/archives |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Membership          | <input type="checkbox"/> Programs         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Black History Month | <input type="checkbox"/> Communications   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Volunteer/Reception | <input type="checkbox"/> Other            |

FEBRUARY-MARCH 2024

PHOTO ALBUM – PHOTO ALBUM -- PHOTO ALBUM – PHOTO ALBUM -- PHOTO ALBUM – PHOTO ALBUM



LEFT:  
Mayor London Breed, Dorothy Lathan, center, with others at dedication of commemorative benches;  
Dorothy and cousin on bench  
BELOW:  
Al Williams at podium;  
Ginger Smyly honors Hilda Robinson  
Rev. Sonya Brunswick gives invocation



LEFT:  
Partial view of audience;  
View of audience applauding

BELOW:  
Ralph Remington, Cultural Affairs Director;  
Leslie Lombre at information table;  
Mayor Breed greets guests





LEFT:  
Ginger Smyly, Kiwan Gore and  
Louis Garrett, society Board  
members at MLK Observance,  
Yerba Buena Center;

Shirley Rodrigues

Black led organizations

**LEARN MORE:**

Read the final report from the San Francisco Reparations Task Force:

<https://sf.gov/sites/default/files/2023-07/AARAC%20Reparations%20Final%20Report%20July%207%2C%202023.pdf>

SF HOUSING LOTTERY OPENS:

[https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2023/sep/09/san-francisco-public-housing-detectives-renewal?utm\\_source=biblioemail-oaklandlibrary&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=2023-09-15](https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2023/sep/09/san-francisco-public-housing-detectives-renewal?utm_source=biblioemail-oaklandlibrary&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=2023-09-15)

Kirk Franklin’s story: How he found his biological Dad

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=49SCqvyZM7Q>

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**TECH STUFF!**

Need help with you tablet, phone or computer? Check out these free services:  
Drop-in Tutorial, Computer Training Center, 5<sup>th</sup> fl., Main Branch, SFPL  
Tech Drop-in, Tuesday and Thursday, 11-3, “Booker T.” Center, Presidio at Sutter

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**FIFTY YEARS OF HIP HOP**

The cultural and artistic phenomena of hip-hop and rap is in its 50<sup>th</sup> year of existence. Look to our cultural outlets, museums, libraries broadcast and cable television to learn more.

<https://oag.ca.gov/ab3121>

<https://oag.ca.gov/system/files/media/ab3121-interim-report-executive-summary-2022.pdf>

<https://oag.ca.gov/ab3121/reports>

[https://sf.gov/sites/default/files/2023-01/HRC%20Reparations%202022%20Report%20Final\\_0.pdf](https://sf.gov/sites/default/files/2023-01/HRC%20Reparations%202022%20Report%20Final_0.pdf)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aUzF-LuuoLM>

<https://www.pbs.org/search/?q=the+road+to+reparations%3e>.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZMxeRooqxao>

RESOURCES -  
REPARATIONS

- ✓ Read The State Interim [Report](#) on Reparations.
- ✓ View [Executive Summary](#) of State Report:
- ✓ Links to [other portions](#) of the State report:
- ✓ View the [California Historical Society briefing](#), “African American Family History and Reparations.”
- ✓ View PBS’ 5 part series, "[The Road to Reparations in California](#)”
- ✓ View San Francisco interfaith Council, “[The findings of the California State Reparations Task Force](#)”
- ✓ Read the draft/final [San Francisco Task Force Report](#)