

TARIK BELL - THE SCHOMBURG

Speakers: Deirdre Lynn Hollman, Tarik Bell

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>> DEIRDRE LYNN HOLLMAN: The Schomburg Junior Scholars Program is a black studies program for teens. It is a unique opportunity for teens in the Harlem community and in communities throughout New York City and even New Jersey and Connecticut to connect to all of the knowledge and resources that are here at the Schomburg Center.

>> TARIK BELL: It was - it was magical for me because Harlem was a place where you know, for me growing up it was the Mecca. So being able to come to the Mecca every Saturday was really purposeful for me.

The Junior Scholars Program was providing me with primary source information on black culture and history, something that I had never encountered before in my entire life. This was an opportunity for me to really get in touch with who I was as a person and to start to think about where I came from and to start to think about where I want to go and to wrestle with those ideas and also to think about where I stand as a young black man creatively.

Over the years of interaction, she watched me grow up. She was really, really a big part of that development. When I needed guidance, I knew that I had somebody who I could call on and somebody who was willing to give me the tough love that I needed to push me towards the best person that I could be.

Deirdre has always been that person for me and she continues to be that person now.

One thing that Deirdre told me is that I have to be true to myself. I need to be in a space where I can allow myself to be me and to be comfortable being me. That was something that she told me about ten years ago that I have held onto for a really, really long time. That has really allowed me to be in a space where I am comfortable with myself and I am comfortable being

different. I am comfortable being creative. I'm comfortable being an activist and being a part of the opposition and that all stems from you know, just one day she said you've got to be you.

Seeing Dr. Muhammad in the position that he is in now gives me hope for my next fifteen years. He is a brilliant man that I look up to and I respect tremendously.

Knowing that a young person as himself can be in the space that he is in gives me the hope and the drive to continue to push myself forward and to continue to be better every day.

So my position at my school is Dean. I am in charge of school discipline and school culture. I help to maintain a strict, healthy school environment while also supporting teachers and students who are struggling.

A large part of my position is teaching my students how to navigate systems and I think that that is a large part of the black experience that a lot of students won't get if they don't have a black male educator in their building.

A lot of them lack a lot of focus and that was something that I was really struggling with as a high school freshman, but it was the Junior Scholars Program that allowed me to put myself in that space.

At the Schomburg, I am an instructor and I am in charge of the social media group. This year we have - we just started this new social media initiative in which our scholars are really jumping in the first with our brand-new hashtag uniquely black. And we are dedicated to showing the world what is going on here at the Junior Scholars Program.

Whenever I do anything in life, I always go back to my experience here at the Junior Scholars Program because of the way that it transformed my life and transformed my mindset.

I will forever be in debt to the Schomburg and the Junior Scholars Program and they will always have my support.