

Panel: Culture and Recognition

Hello! My name is Zoe Smith-Holladay. I'm 19 years old. I'm currently studying for my Bachelor's in History and History of Art at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London, but I'm from the United States.

Article 27 of the United Nations' 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that, "Everyone has a right to freely participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts." But, despite the rich artistic heritage of the African Diaspora, Black children around the world are often deprived of the cultural artifacts and artworks that may empower and inspire them by unequal access to arts education.

I propose that the Permanent Forum supports an initiative to publish and distribute a free basic curriculum for school-aged children on the artistic legacy of the African Diaspora. This curriculum would be interactive, easily available online, and encourage kids to notice the influence of Black culture in their everyday lives and their local communities. From reggaeton to "I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings," the Harlem Renaissance to the Banjo, cornrows to Basket Weaving, Basquiat to the Benin Bronzes. Black art is not static. Black art flows in and around us in innumerable ways everyday.

As a part of the first generation to grow up in this strange, new digital age, I can testify to the reality that the internet can saturate impressionable young minds with limiting, objectifying, and misinformed notions of who they are and who they can be. It is imperative, now more than ever, that we present Black children with positive and creative images to identify with. Art can also give disenfranchised young people the emotional outlet they so desperately need to speak and have their voices be heard.

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I would like to lead this project, but I cannot do it alone. I call upon the Permanent Forum and its allies to help me make this initiative a reality. Thank you to the Permanent Forum and all in attendance today for your dedication to such a necessary mission.