

Case Study

Screening of "Blacks Can't Swim - The Sequel" at POOL Exhibition A Social History of Segregation exhibition at the Fairmount Water Works in Philadelphia USA



Introduction

In March 2022, the screening of "Blacks Can't Swim - The Sequel" took place as part of the POOL: A Social History of Segregation exhibition at the Fairmount Water Works in Philadelphia. Featuring Ed Accura, co-founder of the Black Swimming Association (BSA), this event was designed to be immersive, taking visitors beneath the surface to explore the history of segregated swimming and its ongoing implications for drowning prevention and aquatic access among Black communities. The screening aimed to illuminate ongoing disparities in swimming participation and raise awareness about the importance of water safety.

About the POOL Exhibition

POOL: A Social History of Segregation is a new 4,700-square-foot, multi-disciplinary museum exhibition that opened to the public on March 22, 2022. Set in the Kelly Pool of the National Historic Landmark Fairmount Water Works in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, POOL was created to illuminate a social history of segregated swimming in America and its connection to present-day drowning issues affecting Black communities. Weaving together history, art, storytelling, scholarship, and place-based learning, this exhibition explored the role of public pools in communities with the goal of deepening the understanding of the connection between water, social justice, and public health.

POOL brought together champion swimmers such as Cullen Jones, Maritza Correia McClendon, Simone Manuel, and Sabir Muhammad, along with aquatic activists, researchers, and scholars, including Ed Accura, Naji Ali, Dr. Angela Beale-Tawfeeq, Kevin Colquitt, Malachi and Olivia Cunningham, Dr. Kevin Dawson, Coach Jim Ellis, Rhonda Harper, Dr. Miriam Lynch, Anthony Patterson, Sr., Bruce Wigo, Dr. Jeff Wiltse, and Diversity in Aquatics, Inc. These contributors believe that the answer to correcting swimming disparities lies in making the life-saving skill accessible to all.

As of April 14, 2022, more than 900 people have visited POOL, and over 55,000 have engaged with its companion website, www.poolphl.com. POOL was honoured with a peer-nominated Award for Leadership and Organizational Excellence at Diversity in Aquatics' (DIA) annual conference in February 2022. DIA is a national organisation dedicated to increasing water safety and aquatic activities in historically underrepresented and vulnerable communities.

Additionally, POOL brings to life new work by eleven artists, including an excerpt from Ed Accura's "Blacks Can't Swim— The Sequel" documentary. This collection of work expands the depth and breadth of POOL, providing multiple and unexpected lenses to reconsider the act of swimming together. "Blacks Can't Swim— The Sequel" has received positive feedback from visitors, with many noting that it offers "a fresh" and "much-needed modern spin on the topic."

A primary goal of POOL is to amplify the voices and work of individuals dedicated to aquatic justice, leading to a greater understanding of humanity—a deeper connection to the shared experience of the world, and a vision for a future we must collaboratively build. The "Blacks Can't Swim" documentary film series provided various voices for visitors to consider and relate to, connecting this national narrative to the current international reality of swimming throughout the African Diaspora.

Need Behind the Screening

The need for this screening was grounded in the historical context of segregated swimming in America and its lasting impact on Black communities. Public pools have historically been focal points of social division, and this legacy persists today, contributing to alarming statistics regarding swimming proficiency and drowning rates among African Americans.

Research indicates that Black communities experience higher drowning rates, often due to a lack of access to swimming education and resources. This screening sought to highlight these issues, drawing connections between past injustices and present-day challenges. The documentary, alongside the POOL exhibition, aimed to foster a deeper understanding of the relationship between water, social justice, and public health.

Benefits to the POOL Exhibition and Participants

The screening provided several key benefits for the POOL exhibition and attendees:

- 1. Social Responsibility:** By hosting this event, POOL demonstrated its commitment to addressing historical and contemporary inequalities in aquatic access and safety, aligning with the exhibition's mission to promote social justice and public health.
- 2. Awareness and Education:** Attendees gained valuable insights into the systemic barriers that have historically limited swimming participation among Black communities. The screening served as an educational tool, facilitating discussions about the importance of water safety and swimming proficiency.
- 3. Community Engagement:** The event attracted a diverse audience from all over the world, including community members, aquatic advocates, and scholars, creating a platform for dialogue about the challenges faced by underrepresented groups in accessing swimming education and resources.
- 4. Inspiration and Empowerment:** The screening inspired participants to reflect on their own experiences and consider ways to advocate for greater inclusivity in aquatic activities. Ed Accura's personal stories and insights motivated attendees to engage with the themes presented in the film.

5. Connection to Broader Issues: By featuring "Blacks Can't Swim The Sequel" within the context of the POOL exhibition, attendees were able to see how historical injustices continue to affect present-day realities. This connection helped to frame swimming disparities as not just local issues but part of a larger narrative regarding swimming within the African Diaspora.

Event Structure and Agenda

Introduction: The screening began with an overview of the POOL exhibition, highlighting its goals and the importance of addressing swimming disparities.

Screening: Attendees watched an excerpt from "Blacks Can't Swim The Sequel," which highlighted personal narratives and systemic barriers faced by Black individuals in swimming.

Key Themes Highlighted

The screening illuminated several important themes:

1. **Historical Context:** The legacy of segregation in swimming and its implications for current drowning rates among Black communities was a central focus. Understanding this historical perspective was crucial for attendees to grasp present-day disparities.
2. **Cultural Stigmas:** The film encouraged participants to reflect on their own experiences with swimming and the cultural narratives that influence perceptions of water safety within Black communities.
3. **Call to Action:** The screening emphasised the need for community-driven initiatives to increase swimming participation and education. Attendees expressed a desire to collaborate on programs that promote inclusivity in aquatic activities.
4. **Role of Representation:** The importance of visible role models in swimming was a significant takeaway. Participants recognised that representation could inspire future generations to engage with aquatic sports and feel a sense of belonging in these environments.

Conclusion

The screening of "Blacks Can't Swim The Sequel" at the POOL exhibition was a significant event that successfully connected historical narratives of segregation to contemporary issues of swimming inequality. By fostering an environment for open dialogue and collaboration, the event highlighted the urgent need to address the disparities faced by Black communities in accessing swimming education and resources.

The positive engagement from attendees and the insights gained from the screening reinforce the importance of such initiatives in promoting awareness and advocacy for aquatic justice. By integrating the film's compelling narratives within the context of the broader POOL exhibition, this event served to elevate the discussion around inclusive swimming practices and water safety.

As POOL continues to amplify the voices of those working towards greater inclusivity in swimming, this screening represents a foundational step in building a more equitable future for all individuals in the aquatic environment.

About the Documentaries

The **Blacks Can't Swim** and **Changing the Narrative** documentaries have provided crucial insights into why a disproportionate number of people of African, Caribbean, and Asian heritage do not swim. These documentaries offer valuable perspectives through the lived experiences shared in the films.

These documentaries are essential for anyone who would like to better understand how a lack of diversity and inclusion in aquatics has impacted individuals within ethnically diverse communities. By participating in these

screenings, viewers will gain insight into the complex barriers to aquatic engagement, the opportunities and benefits that being able to swim can provide, and how participation can be promoted within African, Caribbean, and Asian communities.

The screenings offer a comfortable and safe environment for individuals to reflect on their views and address these issues. Additionally, the documentaries delve into important topics beyond swimming, exploring mental health, physical health, dietary choices, and other areas that can benefit from aquatic activities.

For organisations or communities aiming to align with their strategic priorities and focus on reducing inequalities, especially those with a diverse workforce, these screenings offer an opportunity to engage with important societal issues and encourage positive change. By fostering discussions around inclusivity and water safety, organisations can contribute to enhancing community well-being and collectively work towards changing the narrative surrounding swimming participation.

If you are interested in hosting your screening, private packages including a Q&A session are available via the details below, furthering the documentary's mission to raise awareness and advocate for inclusion in aquatics regardless of ethnicity.

Contact info@changingthenarrative.film to initiate change in your workplace and community.

Together, we can foster a culture of understanding, safety, and empowerment for all.

For more information, interested parties can visit www.changingthenarrative.film