

Harlem

History of Harlem

Directions: For a background on Harlem, we recommend listing to this general overview of the neighborhood prior to taking the tour. It is a good introduction and we suggest listening to it on the subway as you make your way to the starting point of the tour.

The first known people to inhabit the area we know call Harlem were native Americans, and one tribe in particular called the Lenape. When the Dutch became the first Westerners to colonize the island of Manhattan in 1624 they named it New Amsterdam and began to spread throughout what we now call New York City. New Amsterdam, located at the southern tip of Manhattan was the first settlement in a much larger territory the Dutch claimed for themselves, calling it New Netherland.

Many Dutchman had come to this new world for the chance to claim land for themselves, settle farms and build homes. As far as records show, the first Dutch homesteader in Harlem was Jochem Pietersen Kuyter in 1639. He called his homestead *Zedendaal*, meaning "Blessed Valley" and its boundaries ran along the Harlem River (also known as the East River) from present-day 127th Street to 140th Street. Today, that area is referred to as Spanish Harlem and is quite different, culturally and demographically than Central Harlem part of Harlem we are visiting today.

By 1658, the infamous Peter "peg leg" Stuyvesant, the last Dutch director-general of New Netherland, formalized this Dutch-settled area as an official settlement, second only to New Amsterdam. Stuyvesant gave the official name of Nieuw Haarlem (New Haarlem), after the Dutch city of Haarlem.

In 1661, the British had taken over New Amsterdam from the Dutch and renamed it New York. Nieu Haarlem became simply Harlem and remained a rural area, unlike New Amsterdam.

When the American Revolution began in 1776, Harlem was the site of one of the very first clashes between British forces and the Patriots led by George Washington. The Battle of Harlem Heights occurred in September of 1776 and Harlem was burned to the ground.

After the war was over, Harlem was slowly rebuilt. Only two roads led from Lower Manhattan to Harlem so the population grew slowly an in the 1820s there were just 91 families living in the area. But in the 1830s railroad service began on the west side of Harlem. More people could now travel to Harlem, but still, it remained sparsely populated and resembled countryside.

This changed in 1878 when elevated rail lines (called the EL trains) were built and ran through Harlem. Now that easy transport was available, land developers began to construct attractive homes marketed to the wealthy residents of New York City who wanted to move uptown as Lower Manhattan was becoming increasingly overcrowded, dirty and unpleasant due to rapid population growth.

On the east side of Harlem, another population was also moving uptown with the help of the EL. East Harlem became a destination for both Italian immigrants. The Italians sprung up on

East 106th Street, and "Italian Harlem" slowly expanded and until the 1920s, the area was the largest Italian population center outside of Italy.

Also, in the late 1800s, in southern Harlem, centered around Lenox Avenue south of 125th Street, there was a Jewish enclave built by second-generation German Jews who had grown up on the Lower East Side in the mid-1800s. When the massive wave of poor Eastern European Jews arrived in the overcrowded Lower East Side in the 1880s, the assimilated and well-off German Jews had already begun to build elegant brownstones for themselves in spacious southern Harlem.

As the poor Eastern Europeans continued to stream into America by the millions, some began to settle in Harlem near their wealthier counterparts. At its peak, the Jewish population of Harlem was approximately 175,000 Jews. In fact, in 1900, Harlem was the 3rd largest Jewish communities in the world, with Krakow being the largest followed by the Lower East Side. The Jewish era of Harlem was very short-lived. In the 1920s, immigration restrictions slowed the influx of Jews to America, and the poor Jews of Harlem, who had by then succeeded in climbing the economic and social ladder, moved to nicer parts of the city. The Jewish population shrunk rapidly and by 1930 approximately 5,000 Jews still lived in Harlem.

A turn of events in the early 1900s led to Harlem's birth as a black neighborhood. In 1903 a real estate market crash occurred and many of the newly built homes that real estate developers had built in the late 1800s sat empty. Simultaneously, large numbers of African-Americans began moving from southern states to the industrialized north in what is known as the Great Migration. They gravitated toward Harlem, where a small black enclave had grown. By 1910 Central Harlem had plenty of empty buildings and a growing population of African Americans in need of housing. Reluctant white landlords losing money on empty houses had no choice but to begin to rent to African American tenants. This was the start of the growth of Harlem as a black neighborhood.

As the 1920s rolled around, Harlem was decidedly a black neighborhood and in this decade, was the site of the era known as the "Harlem Renaissance" which we will discuss later in the tour.

When the Great Depression of 1929 hit hard and Harlem never recovered, not even after World War II when white America was prospering. From the 1950s into the 1980s, Harlem remained a relatively poor neighborhood but a place where black activism grew. In the 1990s housing trends in New York City changed and Harlem was one of the first neighborhoods to experience gentrification.

Throughout this tour, you will see signs of the neighborhood undergoing change, especially on 125th Street at the end of the tour. Our first stop, the Schomburg Center is a great place to learn about the history of the African American presence in Harlem.

Introduction (135th Street Subway Station)

Directions: When you arrive at the 135th Street Station, exit the station and you will be on one of the 4 corners of 135th Street and Lenox Avenue. Depending on which exit you come from, you need to go to the northwest corner to the large reddish modern building with an electronic display on its side facing the corner saying Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture.

Before we start the tour, it is important to note that the large boulevards that run north and south have two names - their original names and then a second name added later to honor an important African-American Individual. Malcolm X Boulevard is also known as Lenox Avenue, Adam Clayton Powell Jr Boulevard is also known as 7th Avenue and Frederick Douglass Boulevard is also known as 8th Avenue. For this tour, we will use the individuals' names.

From the corner, walk about 100 feet (30m) first stop is at 515 Malcolm X Boulevard between West 135th and West 136 streets. This is the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture housed in a large modern building that you will have no trouble spotting.

The Center is open Mondays through Saturdays 10 am to 6 pm, but closed on Sundays. If you are there when it is open, please step inside and take a few minutes to explore the exhibit hall on the first floor while we tell you a brief history of Harlem, and then about the center. The exhibit hall is to the left after you enter the lobby and there a few modern benches if you care to sit.

Schomburg Center

Directions: From the corner walk about 100 feet (30m) first stop is at 515 Malcolm X Boulevard between West 135th and West 136 streets. This is the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture housed in a large modern building that you will have no trouble spotting.

The center houses the largest and most prestigious collection of African-American objects in America. The Center is open Mondays through Saturdays from 10 am to 6 pm, but closed on Sundays. If you are there when it is open, definitely take a few minutes to step into its lobby to explore the exhibit hall on the first floor and its unique gift store.

The Center's collection of over 10 million afro-centric artifacts includes rare historical manuscripts, art objects, books from African-Americans writers like Langston Hughes and James Baldwin, and musical recordings from legends like Nat King Cole. They even have personal items of important African-Americans, like abolitionist Marcus Garvey and political activist Malcolm X.

The foundation of the collection was the large number of afro-centric artifacts and objects that were purchased in 1926 from Arthur Schomburg, known as the Father of Black History. Schomburg was a Puerto Rican of African and German descent who moved to New York and was an important figure in the Harlem Renaissance in the 1920s. After his death in 1938, the library was renamed in his honor. Inside the lobby, you can see a photograph of him.

If you want to see the permanent collection of historical objects on the second floor, you will need to check your bags. Photographs are allowed but without flash. There are public bathrooms on the main floor. Just ask at the information desk when you step inside.

From the Center's entranceway, walk half a block north along Malcolm X Boulevard against the traffic to 136th Street. Cross 136th Street and make a left. Walk about 150 feet (46m) down until you come to the blue awning of Funerals by Design (Point 3 on the map). While you walk, listen to the remaining part of this track about the Harlem Renaissance.

We just mentioned the Harlem Renaissance and so much of Harlem's modern history relates to this historic era from the 1920s to mid-1930s. At this time, Harlem was a popular destination for African-Americans from all over the country because of this movement now referred to as the Harlem Renaissance. This was a time when African-American arts and culture experienced a rebirth and enjoyed a sense of empowerment. Both black people and open-minded white people appreciated the uniqueness of black art, music, and literature.

As the great African-American author, Langston Hughes said years later, that the Harlem Renaissance was a time when "Negro was in vogue". It was a time where Harlem's nightlife was booming in nightclubs like the Cotton Club and the Savoy Ballroom. It was also a time when black and white intellectuals and artists co-mingled at gatherings called "salons." There were lots of salons in Harlem, filled with cultural discussion, the latest fashion and lots of liquor. The most famous - or a rather infamous, salon was located at our next stop.

By now you should be in front of the funeral home. Look across the street where you will see a short building with orange doors.

Madam C. J. Walker

Directions: From the Center's entranceway, walk half a block north along Malcolm X Boulevard against the traffic to 136th Street. Cross 136th Street and make a left. Walk about 150 feet (46m) down until you come to the blue awning of Funerals by Design. The building we will be talking about is across the street on the south side.

This is the Countee Cullen Public Library which sits on the land that was formerly occupied by an elegant townhouse owned by Madam C. J. Walker, the first female African-American millionaire in America. She made her fortune selling a line of hair care products tailored to African American women. When Madam Walker died in 1919, her daughter A'Lelia (Ah-LEEL-ya) took over the family business. But A'Lelia was much more interested in hosting salons at the townhouse. The townhouse became known as the Dark Tower and it was THE place to be seen in Harlem in the 1920s.

Artistic royalty like poet Countee Cullen, authors Zora Neale Hurston, Langston Hughes, activist W.E.B. DuBois and actor Paul Robeson mingled with actual royalty, such as dukes from Europe and kings from Africa. A'Leila died in 1934. She's buried next to her mother at Woodlawn Cemetery in the Bronx. In a fascinating turn of events, Madam CJ Walker's System of Haircare has made a comeback a century later. The company was bought by a larger company who revived Madam Walker's hair care legacy and now products bearing her name are sold in beauty shops across America!

Now walk back to Lenox Avenue and make a left turn walking against the traffic. Walk about 100 feet (30m) until you come to a bus stop. Walk just past the bus stop and look across Lenox Avenue at the large 5 story mural.

Harlem Hospital Mural

Directions: Now walk back to Lenox Avenue and make a left turn walking against the traffic. Walk about 100 feet (30m) until you come to a bus stop. Walk just past the bus stop and look across Lenox Avenue at the large 5 story mural.

This massive 5-story mural on the wall of Harlem Hospital is a recreation of 3 smaller murals located in the hospital and which were painted in 1936. The murals were commissioned by the U.S. federal government's Works Progress Administration to help get unemployed people back to work during the Great Depression. Across the country, artists and writers were paid by the U.S. government to create works of art and literature.

Harlem Hospital was picked as a site for several murals, but there was some controversy stirred by the hospital's administration. The artists submitted their sketches for the murals but the hospital rejected 4 of them saying that they focused too much on "Negro" topics and that in the future, the population of the community might be different and not appreciate the murals' themes. In other words, the hospital was implying that the neighborhood was heading in the direction of more white residents who wouldn't be able to relate to the murals.

Well, the hospital was very wrong. From the 1920s until the 1970s, Harlem was the single largest black neighborhood on earth. Even black neighborhoods in Nairobi, Kenya or Johannesburg, South Africa had smaller black populations than Harlem did in those years.

Despite the hospital's concerns, the murals were painted on various walls inside the hospital. Over the years, they became worn down and were eventually covered up by plaster. Fortunately, in 2012, a 4-million-dollar effort restored the original murals inside and recreated the 3 giant murals you see on the building. Putting controversy aside, what is remarkable about these murals is that they were painted by African-American artists at a time when such artists were hardly accepted as part of the mainstream art world.

The panel of the right side depicts the "great migration" - the massive migration of southern blacks from agricultural lifestyles to the industrialized northern cities in the 1910s. Many of these people settled in Harlem. The middle panel shows the significant contributions to the advancement of medicine and science by African-American professionals and researchers. The panel on the left is a scene typical of a night out on the town in Harlem, perhaps at the Cotton Club or the Savoy Ballroom which was located just down the street from where we are.

Now, before we continue with the rest of this clip,

Continue walking north on Malcolm X Boulevard against the traffic. When you get to 138th Street, make a left and walk about two-thirds of the way down the block (1000 feet/300 m). Stop when you reach the huge neo-gothic church with red doors (stop #5).

Throughout this tour, you will notice many houses of worship. There are over 400 houses of worship in Harlem. Some are in church buildings you might have come to expect, others are located in simple storefronts or brownstone buildings. A lot of these congregations formed in Lower Manhattan in the 19th century before Upper Manhattan had been developed.

You will find worshippers of every Christian denomination: Baptist, Roman Catholic, Seventh Day Adventist, Black Muslims, Jehovah's Witnesses, Episcopalian and Methodist. The oldest black congregation of any denomination in the United States is Mother African Methodist Episcopal Zion located on 137th Street. That congregation was founded in 1796, and was called "the freedom church" and was a safe haven for runaway slaves escaping the south along the "Underground Railroad". But the church that we are about to see is to this day one of America's most prominent and politically active African-American congregations.

Abyssinian Baptist Church

Directions: Continue walking north on Malcolm X Boulevard against the traffic. When you get to 138th Street, make a left and walk about two-thirds of the way down the block (1000 feet/300 m). When you reach the huge neo-gothic church with red doors stop here.

By now you should have reached the Abyssinian Baptist Church, formed in 1809 by black parishioners who worshipped at the integrated First Baptist Church in Lower Manhattan. In early America, not all African Americans were enslaved. There were many free people of color, who lived mainly in the Northern States, while enslaved black people were mostly in the Southern States. Free African Americans were able to worship where they wished, as long as they were welcomed by the typically white congregations.

Some of the parishioners at the integrated First Baptist Church decided in 1809 to leave the Church and form their own congregation in protest over being restricted to racially segregated seating. Among these African-American parishioners were Ethiopian seamen. They named their new congregation the Abyssinian Baptist Church after the ancient name of Ethiopia. The congregation grew quickly over the decades and by 1923, they had so many members, this large and beautiful neo-gothic and renaissance style church was built. From the 1920's until the early 1960's, it was the most influential black church in America. It still is very politically active with a lot of influence in New York and Washington DC.

The church's current preacher is the Reverend Calvin Butts Jr. but its most famous was the dynamic Adam Clayton Powell Jr. who became the church's preacher in 1937. His dedication to progressing black rights led Powell to enter politics. In 1941, he became the first black councilman in New York City history. In 1944, he went even further and became a United States congressman, making him an early pioneer in African-American national politics. He served 14 terms in the United States House of Representatives. In 1971, Powell left politics and when he died in 1973, nearby Seventh Avenue was renamed Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. Boulevard. To this day, he remains a role model for aspiring African-American politicians and activists.

Abyssinian Baptist Church is well known for its gospel choir and it attracts a large number of tourists. For this reason, the church has very strict rules about attending their services. Tourists are permitted to attend the Sunday morning 11:30 am service and you are expected to remain for the entire service so as to not disrupt the service. Services are about 2 hours long. There is always a line to get in, so admission is on a first-come, first-served basis. There is a strict dress code and large bags such as backpacks are not allowed.

You will likely do better to find another gospel service either in Harlem or in other parts of the city. To find out about other places you can hear a gospel service see our guide to attending a gospel service. <http://www.freetoursbyfoot.com/where-to-hear-gospel-music-in-new-york-city/>

Continue walking on 138th street past the church to the corner of Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. Boulevard and stop by the short modern apartment building.

Harlem Renaissance Ballroom

Directions: Continue walking on 138th street past the church to the corner of Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. Boulevard and stop by the short modern apartment building.

This apartment building stands on the site of what was home to the Harlem Renaissance Ballroom, one of Harlem's most famous nightclubs for over 50 years. Called the Ren for short, it was the only upscale entertainment spot for Harlem's black community. It had 900 seats and hosted concerts, films and large parties. The list of musicians and performers who played there is endless! Legends like Duke Ellington, Count Basie, and Ella Fitzgerald were regulars.

In 1923, the Ballroom's owner, William Roach, was asked by Bob Douglas, the owner of an all-black basketball team called the Spartan Braves if the team could use the main floor of the Ren for their home games. The Spartan Braves didn't have a home court even though they were a leading contender for the black national championship title. The Ren had a spacious floor and balcony seating perfect for the team's fans to watch games. Roach agreed if Douglass would change the team's name to the Rens. The deal was sealed and the Rens went on to fame and became America's first all-black, black-owned, fully professional basketball team. Not only were they champions of black league basketball, they often beat white national champion basketball teams like the Original Boston Celtics. Sadly, this historic Ballroom burnt down in 1970's, but its legacy remains.

Now cross Adam Clayton Powell Jr. Boulevard. It is a double-wide boulevard so be sure to watch the minute countdown on the crossing sign and give yourself time to cross safely. Once you are on the other side of the boulevard continue walking along 138th Street.

Know Your Rights Mural

Directions: Now cross 138th Street to the north side of the street. On the building off to your left you will see a large mural that says Know Your Rights.

This colorful and powerful mural was unveiled in 2013 and sponsored by the activist group the People's Justice for Community Control and Police Accountability and the mural was financed by the Center for Constitutional Rights, that is one of the pre-eminent legal groups that protect Americans' constitutional rights violations.

The mural is one of several painted throughout the city in the wake of growing acts of violence by the police towards people of color before that person has even been arrested. The mural is instructional and sums up the most important constitutional rights a person has if approached by the police. You can read through and see the steps someone should take to protect themselves from being hurt or in so many cases, killed by police, even when that person was innocent. You can also see the names of victims who were unlawfully killed by police.

More and more "Know Your Rights" murals are being painted in New York City, in neighborhoods where there is a pattern of police violence. While the murals are local, they echo the nationwide issue of police violence and the persistent violation of people of color's constitutional rights by police. These murals are just a small example of the much larger movement of Black Lives Matter.

When you are ready, cross Adam Clayton Powell Jr. Boulevard. It is a double-wide boulevard so be sure to watch the minute countdown on the crossing sign and give yourself time to cross safely. Once you are on the other side of the boulevard continue walking along 138th Street on the side of the street with the light colored brick buildings.

Strivers Row + Frederick Douglass

Directions: When you are ready, cross Adam Clayton Powell Jr. Boulevard. It is a double-wide boulevard so be sure to watch the minute countdown on the crossing sign and give yourself time to cross safely. Once you are on the other side of the boulevard continue walking along 138th Street on the side of the street with the light colored brick buildings.

As you walk down the street you can see immediately that these are special houses. They are architecturally beautiful but they were also a benchmark for black residents of Harlem. The houses along 138th Street and 139th Street were built in 1891 by white real estate developer David H. King, the Donald Trump of his time. It has since come to be referred to as Strivers Row.

In that era, Harlem was not yet an African-American neighborhood. King's goal was to build a 160-house development tailored to wealthy white residents. However, King's venture failed and many of the houses sat empty as the development company refused to sell them to black residents. Finally, in 1919, almost 30 years after they were built, the development company gave in and allowed black residents to purchase these homes. That was due to the fact that the neighborhood was changing quickly from white to black. Soon, many of New York City's African-American elite had purchased a "Royal King House" for \$8,000 each. Today that is the equivalent of \$114,000, which isn't even enough money to buy you a tiny studio apartment in this neighborhood, let alone an entire townhouse!

Many of the new owners included ambitious and accomplished members of the black community, such as doctors, lawyers, and successful performers. These townhouses became associated with black wealth, whose owners strove to become prestigious, while the rest of Harlem slowly turned into a ghetto. That's when the street earned the nickname of "Strivers' Row". As you reach the middle of the block, notice the gated plots of land between the houses. Plots like these were stable mews for the horses to drive carriages -- there weren't cars in those days! The entrance to the plot between houses 251 and 253 still says "Walk your Horses."

Before we continue, here are the directions to the next stop. The remaining audio of this clip is meant to be listened to

Continue down the street until you reach Frederick Douglass Jr Boulevard. Make a left and walk three blocks south, against the traffic, to 135th Street, where you will make a left. Approximately 10 feet (3m) from the corner you will see a triangular plaque embedded in the street.

The Boulevard you are walking along is an extension of the same 8th Avenue that starts at 14th Street. In 1977 it was co-named Frederick Douglass Boulevard in honor of this famed abolitionist, writer, statesman and fiery public speaker in the pre and post Civil War years. Douglas was born into slavery in Maryland around 1818. At the age of twenty, he escaped from his enslavement and fled to New York where he was sheltered at the house of David Ruggles, a noted African-American abolitionist. You can see the Ruggles house in Tribeca in Lower Manhattan. Take a look at our self-guided Tribeca tour to learn more.

As a free man, Douglass became known worldwide. The autobiography of his life as a slave was an overnight sensation. Douglas also established the newspaper The North Star, which became the most influential African-American run anti-slavery publication of the time. Frederick Douglass may be lesser known than other significant African-Americans of modern times, this boulevard ensures that Douglass's legacy will be known by everyone.

Harlem Walk of Fame

Directions: Continue down the street until you reach Frederick Douglass Jr Boulevard. Make a left and walk three blocks south, against the traffic, to 135th Street, where you will make a left. Approximately 10 feet (3m) from the corner you will see a triangular plaque embedded in the street

You are now walking along the Harlem Walk of Fame, that runs on both sides of 135th Street all the way east until Adam Clayton Powell Jr. Boulevard. On this side of the street, you will pass plaques honoring famous individuals who lived in Harlem at some point in their lives. The plaques say what each person was known for and the dates of their life and death.

The first plaque is for the preacher and then politician Adam Clayton Powell Jr., who we discussed earlier at the Abyssinian Church.

Next is Tito Puente, "The King of Latin Music" In the 1950s at the height of his popularity, Puente was a music innovator by mixing Latin music with jazz. During his career, he won 5 Grammy awards.

Then you will see Langston Hughes who was a poet, writer, playwright whose African-American themes made him a primary contributor to the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s.

Next, is the actor and activist, Paul Robeson. Most people know Robeson from his powerful rendition of the song "Ol Man River". But before his acting career, Robeson went to law school in 1920 at Columbia University which is located adjacent to Harlem.

James Baldwin is also honored for being a poet, writer, playwright and a black activist whose most well-known book *Go Tell it On The Mountain* is about life growing up in Harlem.

The next plaque is for the Queen of Jazz, Ella Fitzgerald. For more than half a century she was the most popular female jazz singer in the United States. She won 13 Grammy awards and sold over 40 million albums. She began her singing career during the Great Depression when she was picked to perform at Amateur Night at the Apollo theater, which we will visit later in this tour. A shy 17-year-old Ella sang in public on the stage for the first time and brought the house down. The rest is history.

Next is Marcus Garvey, who was born in Jamaica in 1887 but came to America in 1916 where he came to be known as the "Black Moses" as he led the largest organized black nationalist mass movement in history. He founded the Universal Negro Improvement Association which existed from 1919 to 1926 and was based in Harlem. At speeches to enormous crowds of black Americans, he spoke of quote "a new Negro," who should be proud to be black. His strength and activism influenced black power activists for nearly a century.

The next plaque is for a woman known as Ms. Fashion, Lois Alexander, who was an African American fashion designer, businesswoman, and curator of the Harlem Institute of Fashion and the Black Fashion Museum. At one time, the museum displayed Jacqueline Kennedy's wedding dress which was designed by an African-American clothes designer Ann Lowe. Though the museum no longer exists, that dress and others are preserved in Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture.

The following plaque is for Percy Sutton, who in the 1960s was a civil rights attorney who represented Malcolm X who was assassinated in 1965. Sutton was also an influential New York politician and highly successful businessman who led the revitalization of Harlem, including the restoration of the famous Apollo Theater. Before all these great accomplishments, Sutton served as an intelligence officer for the famed Tuskegee Airmen during World War II.

Next is the plaque for Hope Stevens, who was a lawyer, businessman and civic leader who helped found a mutual insurance company and savings bank in Harlem. He fought job discrimination against blacks and became the first black president of the Uptown Chamber of Commerce.

The next plaque is for Arturo Schomburg whom we discussed at the first stop on the tour at the Schomburg Center

After is the plaque for Vivian Robinson who was a strong supporter of black arts and theater. In the 1960s, while working at the Amsterdam News, a prominent black run New York newspaper, she noticed that hardly any small black theater companies were being covered and reviewed. She volunteered to review their productions. In 1973, she founded Audelco - the Audience Development Committee whose mission is to “generate recognition, understanding, and awareness of the arts in black communities”. Though Ms. Robinson passed away in 1996 Audelco is still going and strong and is essential in getting black-run theater productions and talent the recognition they deserve.

The final plaque is for David Dinkins, the first African American Mayor of New York City who served between 1989 and 1993. After working as a lawyer for many years, he began his career in New York City politics in the 1960s, first as city clerk, then the Manhattan Borough President, before becoming the Big Apple's first African-American Mayor.

When you reach Adam Clayton Powell Junior Boulevard, make a right turn and cross 135th street. Stop on the corner and look to your left down 135th where you can see in the distance a very large and tall brown brick building with a neon sign saying YMCA. Since we will spend a few minutes telling you about the YMCA, we suggest you turn around and walk to the building on that corner. It is an IHOP restaurant and is a good place to stand without blocking the sidewalk.

Dizzie Gillespie Mural

Directions: As you walk along the Walk of Fame, stop at 229 West 135th Street and look at the side of the building.

You will see two massive murals of the American jazz legend, Dizzy Gillespie. The murals were created in 2017 to celebrate Gillespie's 100th birthday.

Gillespie was a celebrity in Harlem where he performed venues around the neighborhood over the years. He already has a plaque along the Walk of Fame. It is located across the street from the mural.

YMCA

Directions: When you reach Adam Clayton Powell Junior Boulevard, make a right turn and cross 135th street. Stop on the corner and look to your left down 135th where you can see in the distance a very large and tall brown brick building with a neon sign saying YMCA. Since we will spend a few minutes telling you about the YMCA, we suggest you turn around and walk to the building on that corner. It is an IHOP restaurant and is a good place to stand without blocking the sidewalk.

Y-M-C-A stands for the Young Men's Christian Association. Many YMCA's are both neighborhood social centers with gymnasiums and they also rent small rooms for men to stay in. This YMCA was constructed in 1931 and is a New York Landmark Building. But it's not the building that holds such significance. This YMCA played a big part in equalizing the playing field between black and white men in the 1930s. Until 1946, the YMCA policy was total segregation. There were white YMCAs and black YMCAs. When this YMCA was built in Harlem, it was intended for African American men only. Not only did black men finally have a YMCA where they could rent rooms but it was also one of the best equipped in the city! Sorry, no whites allowed.

Over the years, dozens of the most important black figures in African American history stayed here: authors Langston Hughes, Richard Wright and Ralph Ellison, actors Paul Robeson and Bill "Bojangles" Robinson, civil rights activists Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr. ; musicians and actors Eubie Blake, W.C. Handy, and Duke Ellington. Baseball legend Willie Mays of the New York Giants stayed here even though his white teammates got to stay in nice hotels. Mays was arguably the best ballplayer of his day, it just didn't matter. Famous or not, if you were black, you were not welcome in white hotels. It's truly amazing what talent passed through this building and the cultural standards that were changed by this building's existence.

Smalls Paradise (IHOP)

Some of Harlem's history took place in buildings that no longer exist - for example, this IHOP restaurant that you are next to be the home of Smalls Paradise, the only well-known Harlem nightclub that was racially integrated. 1925 was the height of the Harlem Renaissance, and Smalls was THE place to go when you wanted to dance all night long. When other Harlem clubs shut down at 3 am, Smalls was just getting going. Musicians finishing work at other clubs headed to Smalls to have impromptu jam sessions. To top off the craziness, Smalls held "breakfast dances" with a full floor show of performers that STARTED at 6 am!

After 30 years of running Smalls, the original owner Ed Smalls sold the club in 1955. In the 1960s, basketball legend Wilt Chamberlain of the Celtics bought the club and renamed it "Big Wilt's Smalls Paradise." Among the many singers who performed at Smalls was an up and coming Ray Charles. Smalls attracted a celebrity clientele like millionaire Howard Hughes, composer Irving Berlin, and actress Ava Gardner.

Now, before we continue this audio clip.

From the IHOP, continue walking south on Adam Clayton Powell Junior Boulevard in the same direction of the cars on your side of the street. We will be walking 5 streets south to 130th Street.

As mentioned earlier on the tour, Harlem is filled with houses of worship. As you walk down Adam Clayton Powell Boulevard you will see 3 or 4 of them like Shiloh Baptist Church, Trinity Church of Harlem, and the Williams Institutional CME. While not all houses of worship are in buildings as spectacular as the Abyssinian Baptist Church we saw earlier, many of Harlem's congregations have Gospel choirs as good as the Abyssinian Baptist Church. Some other great places to hear the gospel are the Greater Refuge Temple on Adam Clayton Powell Jr. Blvd. at

124th Street, the Times Square Church at Broadway and 51st Street right in Midtown and the Brooklyn Tabernacle in Downtown Brooklyn right near Brooklyn Heights. You can find out more about where you can hear great gospel by looking at our blog post "[Gospel Music in Harlem and the Rest of New York City](#)"

When you reach 130th Street make a left and begin walking down the street in the direction of the cars. We are heading to building 109 towards the end of the block. Look for the awning on the street level that says New Amsterdam Musical Association. Along the way, notice the especially attractive buildings on the south side of the street in the middle of the block.

New Amsterdam Musical Association

At 109 130th Street, you will find the New Amsterdam Musical Association also known as NAMA. NAMA was founded in 1904 as a union for black musicians who were not allowed to join the white-only musicians union. From 1904 until 1922, NAMA moved its office 7 times until finally having enough money to buy the building you are now looking at. When NAMA moved into this brownstone, the garden apartment was a rehearsal space and the upstairs was a cheap hotel for black musicians. The list of musical legends who stayed here is incredible! Singers Lena Horne, Fats Domino, James Brown, Billie Holiday and Saxophonist Charlie Parker. Although the union does not exist anymore, NAMA serves as a hub for local musicians to come and rehearse. They also hold Open Mic nights on Mondays. You can hear original poetry, jazz, and some wild comedy. For just \$5, it's definitely worth the trip here.

Continue to the corner and make a right, crossing the street. Turn right onto Malcolm X Boulevard and walk south in the direction of the cars to 129th Street. Cross 129th Street walk past Jacobs Eatery, the restaurant on the corner. On the doorway just after Jacob's ends and the next building, you will see a cartoonish mural of a young black man with a beret, oversized sneakers, jewelry and a welcoming attitude. The mural says, "Welcome to Harlem New York".

Welcome to Harlem

Directions: Continue to the corner and make a right, crossing the street. Turn right onto Malcolm X Boulevard and walk south in the direction of the cars to 129th Street. Cross 129th Street walk past Jacobs Eatery, the restaurant on the corner. On the doorway just after Jacob's ends and the next building, you will see a cartoonish mural of a young black man with a beret, oversized sneakers, jewelry and a welcoming attitude. The mural says, "Welcome to Harlem New York".

Continue walking south on Malcolm X Boulevard to 127th Street while I tell you about the mural's creator.

The door mural is just a small sample of the amazing works by Franco the Great, also known as the Picasso of Harlem. He is so well-known for his artwork, especially along the store gates of 125th Street that he has been written about by The New York Times. He has been invited to paint murals around the world, but his most meaningful work is in Harlem, where

he paints large murals about the culture of the neighborhood on store gates that would otherwise be just ugly metal gates. Keep in mind that you can only see his work after shops close and the store gates are down. If you want to see him creating his masterpieces, you can find him every Sunday from 9 am to 1 pm on 125 Street across the street from the Apollo Theater (which will be the last stop on this tour).

When you reach 127th Street, turn left to cross Malcolm X Boulevard. When you have crossed, head south along the Boulevard for half a block and you will see the large lighted sign for the one and only Sylvia's Soul Food restaurant.

Sylvia's Soul Food Restaurant

Directions: When you reach 127th Street turn left to cross Malcolm X Boulevard. When you have crossed, head south along the Boulevard for half a block and you will see the large lighted sign for the one and only Sylvia's Soul Food restaurant.

If you aren't familiar with what "soul food" is, you're not alone. Soul Food is a very specific cuisine that originated in rural Southern states among African American communities. Soul Food dishes are based around fish, chicken and pork mostly, beans, all sorts of greens, and cornmeal used in cornbread and hush puppies. It wasn't until the 1960s when the term "Soul Food" was used to refer to this cuisine. The 60s were an era of African-Americans fighting for their civil rights and establishing their unique identity in America. In the 60s, you could hear black people call each other "soul sister" or "soul brother". And of course, can you imagine a world without Soul Music? No James Brown? No Otis Redding? No Aretha Franklin? That's no life at all.

When Sylvia Woods opened up her restaurant in 1962 serving up classic African American dishes like chicken and waffles, collard greens, candied yams and more, she became known as the "the Queen of Soul Food." This queen didn't have such a royal childhood. As a young girl in South Carolina without a stable family upbringing, she was determined to make something of herself. She moved to New York City to become a beautician. To make ends meet, she worked at a restaurant even though she had never been to a restaurant in her life!

After 7 years, the restaurant's owner was so impressed by Sylvia's hard-working spirit and her fantastic food that he sold the restaurant to her. She risked everything she had to buy the restaurant. It paid off. Her restaurant is known around the world and it is not uncommon to see celebrities dining here because the food is just that darn good. President Obama chowed down on ribs here, President Clinton ate here too (after all his office building is a few blocks away). Other celebrities include Beyonce, Doug E. Fresh, Susan Lucci, Liza Minnelli, Grandmaster Flash, and so many more.

Sylvia Woods died in 2012, but her amazing food is still served up in the same location it's been in for 40 years. If you do decide to eat at Sylvia's, we recommend that you try black-eyed peas, candied yams, peach cobbler and collard greens.

Walk past Sylvia's to the corner of 126th Street and look at the street sign. You can see that the sign says "Sylvia P. Woods Way". That is just how large a part of Harlem culture Sylvia's was and still is.

Cross 126th Street and about 100 feet (30 m) in you cannot miss the big red neon sign that says Red Rooster.

Red Rooster

Directions: Cross 126th Street and about 100 feet (30 m) in you cannot miss the big red neon sign that says Red Rooster.

This is the second restaurant in New York City opened by world-famous chef Marcus Samuelsson, who was born in Ethiopia and adopted by a Swedish couple. During his childhood in Sweden, he developed a passion for cooking and came to New York as a sous chef at the stylish restaurant Aquavit, which served Scandinavian cuisine.

At age 23, Samuelson was the youngest chef to receive a coveted 3-star review from the highly respected New York Times food reviewer Ruth Reichl. A few years later, Samuelsson began biking around Harlem, just out of curiosity. This is when he began to think of opening a restaurant where he could serve American comfort food with hints of his Swedish and African roots.

In 2009, he had the honor of cooking the first State Dinner for President Obama. Just one year later his dream came true and he opened Red Rooster. Celebrities are always stopping by, and meanwhile, Samuelsson, a celebrity himself, has continued to open other restaurants around the world.

Now, let's walk and talk, but before we do, let's give you some directions

Continue past Red Rooster and at 125th Street, make a right turn. Stay on the north side of 125th Street. If you see the CVS shop on the corner you are walking towards, then you are headed in the right direction. Once you have crossed the boulevard continue walking one long block along Harlem's main street - the famous 125th Street as we head toward our last three locations.

125th Street tells a story. The story of change, progression and now gentrification. In the late 1800s, blacks in Harlem were not easily accepted into the neighborhood which was primarily Jews and Italians. Even during the Harlem Renaissance, when black culture was at a peak, blacks were not allowed to go to many white clubs or eat at local luncheonettes and restaurants. But since 1999, 125th Street became the focus of gentrification - when people from outside the neighborhood come in, buy up businesses and property and fundamentally change the culture of the neighborhood. What that means is that prices go up and the original residents are priced out.

Some say that gentrification is simply taking a neighborhood that could be doing better financially for its residents and rejuvenating it with new shops. 20 years ago 125th Street looked a whole lot different, with shops that catered to the interests and needs of the African-American residents. But now as you walk down the street you might feel that you are in any city in the US. You will see Whole Foods, Starbucks, CVS, Dunkin Donuts, Staples, H&M, even an Olive Garden a national chain Italian restaurant. If you are in Harlem, wouldn't you rather have authentic African-American soul food? Times have changed.

By now you should be at the northeast corner of 125th Street and Adam Clayton Powell Jr. Boulevard. On your right, you will see a very tall building, The Adam Clayton Powell Jr State Office Building. At the corner, there is a statue of him surrounded by benches. This

is a great spot to grab a seat, take in the flavor and learn about the Hotel Theresa located diagonally across the street.

(Optional) Clinton Foundation Office

Directions: Optional stop to the former offices of the Clinton Foundation. Continue past Red Rooster and at 125th Street make a left turn and walk to 55 W. 125th St., a large office building in the middle of the block.

This building is where, in 2001, former president Bill Clinton rented several floors for the William J. Clinton Foundation offices. Some in the neighborhood were excited and believed that the former President's Foundation would put a presidential stamp of approval on Harlem's revival.

In a speech Clinton made here in front of 2000 Harlem residents and civic leaders, he said, "Harlem always struck me as a place that was human, and alive, where there was a rhythm to life and a song in the heart, where no matter how bad it was, people held up their heads and went on, and when things got good, people were grateful and cared about their neighbors."

But not everyone was so happy about his arrival and felt that it contributed to rising rents and contributed to Harlem's gentrification. In 2011, the foundation announced its plans to move its offices downtown to the Financial District. The response from locals was barely noticeable. Some didn't care, saying that he rarely came out into the neighborhood and did nothing for Harlem but cause rents to soar. Nevertheless, this building does have a small place in history.

Turn around and back-track to Malcolm X Boulevard. Cross the boulevard toward the big CVS store on the corner. Once you have crossed the boulevard continue walking one long block along Harlem's main street - the famous 125th Street as we head toward our last three locations.

Hotel Theresa

When the 13 floor, 300 room Hotel Theresa was built in 1913, it was the tallest building in Harlem. It remained so until the Adam Clayton Powell Jr. State Office Building behind you was built in 1973. At first, the Hotel Theresa was a residential hotel, but also had guests for shorter stays. The hotel's beautiful use of terra cotta on the outside and its two-story penthouse dining room with panoramic views earned it the nickname "the Waldorf of Harlem". But, as we have heard many times before on his tour, the hotel was segregated and no black people could stay there.

This changed in 1937 when Love B. Woods, an African-American businessman bought the hotel, ended the segregation policy and that's when things got going. Ironically, the downtown hotels' segregation policies brought in a lot of amazing African-American guests to the Theresa. Guests over the years included musicians, singers and performers, Louis Armstrong, Josephine Baker, Ray Charles, Dorothy Dandridge, Duke Ellington, Jimi Hendrix, Lena Horne, Dinah Washington and Little Richard. Boxers Muhammad Ali, Sugar Ray Robinson and Joe Louis stayed there. In fact, it's where Joe Louis celebrated his post-fight parties. The hotel was also

the office of the organizers of Dr. Martin Luther King Junior's historic "March on Washington" in 1963.

But the most infamous event to happen at the hotel was when Fidel Castro, who was in New York to speak at the United Nations, checked into the Theresa after storming out of the Shelbourne Hotel, where he had planned to stay. Just after arriving at the Shelbourne, Castro was furious that the hotel was asking his entourage for a massive cash advance of \$10,000 to cover any damages his Cuban delegation might cause to their rooms. Castro left the Shelbourne in a huff and went to the Hotel Theresa, saying he felt more at home among Harlem's majority black population. A Cuban flag was soon hoisted above the Theresa, and the streets outside filled with thousands of pro and anti-Castro protesters. While there, Castro met Malcolm X for several hours. But more importantly, the Hotel was the site of Fidel Castro and Nikita Khrushchev's first face to face meeting.

The hotel closed down in 1970 and was converted into an office building. The building itself was declared a landmark by New York City in 1993.

When you are ready to head over to our last stop, go to the corner and cross Adam Clayton Powell Junior Boulevard. When you have crossed continue on 125th Street about half a block to the legendary Apollo Theater. You cannot miss its marquee lights and big red neon sign!

Apollo Theater

Directions: When you are ready to head over to our last stop, go to the corner and cross Adam Clayton Powell Junior Boulevard. When you have crossed continue on 125th Street about half a block to the legendary Apollo Theater. You cannot miss its marquee lights and big red neon sign!

No trip to Harlem is complete without visiting the Apollo Theater. The Apollo theater was originally opened in 1913 as the New Burlesque Theater. As you might have guessed, segregated policies kept black theatergoers from seeing shows. But that would change in 1933 when Fiorello La Guardia, who would later become New York City's Mayor, began a campaign against burlesque. This meant that the New Burlesque Theater would have to close or come up with a new approach. The owners changed from showcasing burlesque to putting on variety shows and marketed the shows to the growing African-American community in Harlem. And that was when the Apollo was born.

The Apollo became the top theater for live entertainment in Harlem. The Apollo started hosting an "amateur night" where unknown performers came up on stage and did their thing. Cheers could make you and boos could break you. The Apollo's Amateur night is its most enduring feature. If contestants are good, the audience cheers, and if the performer is REALLY good, the audience goes wild and you can bet that that performer just might be a star one day. But there are plenty of pretty awful contestants. That's when the audience starts booing, hooting and hollering.

Decades ago, performers who were escorted off the stage by the legendary tap dancer, the Sandman who would come out with his giant wooden cane and literally - but gently - pull the unwanted performer off the stage. It was all in good-natured vaudeville style fun. Nowadays, bad contestants are simply ushered off the stage.

The list of performers who made their debut and went on to stardom is mindblowing. In 1934, a 17-year-old Ella Fitzgerald made her singing debut at the Apollo, winning a \$25 prize. Other Amateur night winners included Gladys Knight, Ronnie Spector, and Jimi Hendrix. The Apollo was also where performers who had budding careers made their big debuts launching them to stardom. To list a few, Billie Holiday, Lena Horne & Count Basie and his Orchestra. In later decades, stars were born, like Stevie Wonder, Michael Jackson, James Brown and Lauryn Hill. You can go to Amateur Night, which usually takes place on Wednesday evenings. Just look at their website or ask about the schedule at the box office. For \$30 or under, you might just see the world's next superstar.

Before you wrap up your tour of Harlem, take a look the Apollo's "Walk of Fame" in front of the theater. Like Hollywood Boulevard in Los Angeles, the Apollo has installed brass plates with the signatures of stars that have been inducted into the Apollo Legends Hall of Fame. There simply is no place like the Apollo, both in its role of introducing the world to amazing music but also as a place where performers - and audiences - of color could call home.

End

This tour is now over and we hoped you enjoyed learning about this vibrant and historic neighborhood. From the Apollo theater you can take the A, C, B or D trains from the 125th Street station just two blocks away at St. Nicholas Avenue. Or you can walk back along 125th Street, do some shopping and people-watching, and catch the 2 or 3 trains at 125th Street and Malcolm X Boulevard.

If you had a good time, check out our other audio tours, such as our Midtown Manhattan audio tour, or our Central Park audio tour. Or consider signing up for our pay what you wish walking tours. Go to www.freetoursbyfoot.com