



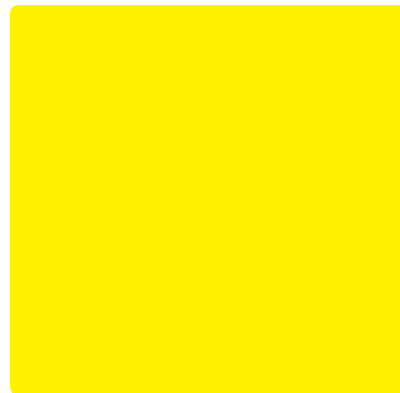
Elan Cadiz



Dinga McCannon

harlem is...

A COMMEMORATIVE JOURNAL
celebrating 20 years
of **harlem is...**





Paul Deo

In the community harlem is... celebrates Heroes of the Pandemic



First graduates of the CUNY Medical School



Special Curator of the CUNY Medical School



Elan Cadiz



David Vadez Joseph



Sophia Dawson



[A] Marcos Davis [B] Choo



REFLECTIONS ON 20 YEARS OF **harlem is...**

What began in one classroom in Harlem became a renowned multimedia living history exhibition series



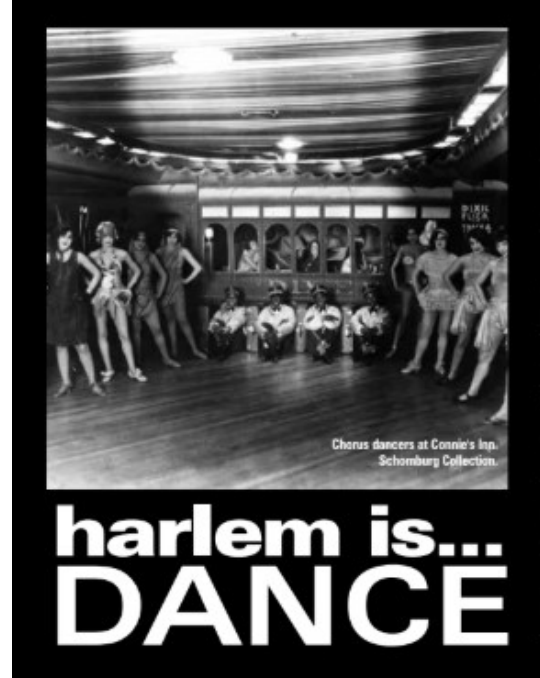
This year Community Works celebrates two decades of work using the arts to bridge neighborhoods and delving into Harlem's rich cultural history for lessons and legacies to share across generations. Importantly, it has also been 20 years since we began an extraordinary collaboration with Voza Rivers of New Heritage Theatre Group.

How proud we are of having co-produced more than 25 exhibitions including the ever-expanding **harlem is...** series that honors the people and legends of Harlem's music, theater, dance and community activism. We have teamed up to offer more than 200 intergenerational, multicultural performances and workshops to bring those exhibitions alive.

And we have proudly brought students together with more than 100 legendary figures in Harlem, encouraging them to interview and write about the heroes in their own back yard.

This award-winning series of exhibitions has toured citywide to more than 30 locations from the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture in Harlem to Federal Hall National Memorial on Wall Street. More than three





million people have viewed the exhibitions and participated in our interactive programming.

In 2018 we entered into a unique partnership with Harlem Hospital Center to permanently host Community Works' **harlem is...** exhibition series. Harlem Hospital Center is a premier hospital and community resource with a commitment to art and healing and is home to renowned WPA murals of the 1930s, the first to depict people of color in medical profession roles.

We installed our 30-foot Harlem timeline in the first floor Mural Pavilion, hosted countless school and visitor groups to whom we provided curriculum materials and tours and produced a series of "Spirit of Community" art exhibitions by local artists that celebrate the diversity of Harlem's people. Accompanying public programs allowed neighbors to meet artists and discuss the themes in the work on display.

Also in 2018, we began to plan an expanded, multimedia installation of photographs, archival materials, films and portraits from the **harlem is... MUSIC, THEATER** and **DANCE** exhibits on the second floor of Harlem Hospital. We also commissioned a new mural for placement adjacent to the Mural Pavilion based on imagery that artist Paul Deo associates with the 1958 rescue of Dr. Martin Luther King at Harlem Hospital after he was stabbed in a local book store.

Our plans to open this unique multi-faceted exhibition in June 2020 were temporarily halted by the coronavirus pandemic. The official opening, when it occurs, will cap decades of work to make a one-of-a-kind installation about



Harlem's cultural history with tours and community programs, meet the artist sessions, films and rotating art exhibitions.

In the meantime, we are proud to have created a website—Harlem-is.org—that demonstrates how we can find new ways to tell stories even in devastating times. Those efforts also produced our newest **harlem is... HEALING** digital campaign that honors more than 30 Harlemites from different walks of life who are helping to keep the community whole. As our Healing honorees prove, obstacles simply sharpen our creativity, and we will move ahead with workshops and discussions online. We are committed to finding ways to enable the community to tell its own story, regardless of the means of storytelling.

We look forward to our delayed opening celebration to which we will welcome artists and activists, students and seniors, and all other supporters of the fabled neighborhood of Harlem.

Welcome to the 20th anniversary of **harlem is...**



Voza Rivers

Voza Rivers
Executive Producer
New Heritage Theatre Group

Barbara Horowitz

Barbara Horowitz
Founder and President
Community Works NYC

Harlem is Healing: Art and Community

Containing disease and re-starting the economy have been the prime goals of community efforts locally and across the globe. But dealing with our emotional and community responses have been important as well, particularly among artists who have been sidelined by lockdown orders.

Reflecting how artists are responding has been one of the results of a new digital campaign by Community Works and New Heritage Theatre Group to celebrate local Harlem heroes in a time of coronavirus. Through posts on Facebook and Instagram, the campaign is building on the spirit of the 20-year effort to spotlight local heroes, famous or not, who are making a difference through the pandemic. It is getting a lot of response.

Over two decades, Community Works and New Heritage have sought to display the transformational power of art in social justice and in building community.

Andrea Arroyo's paintings, for example, remind us that art can help healing. Her latest works are from a series she calls *PAINTED IN NY* to record her own and others' experiences in the virus lockdown, and to encourage widespread acceptance of the Stay at Home message as help to limit the spread of the virus. Arroyo is an award-winning artist who works in a variety of media. For a long time, I have been working on that address social justice. This is a worldwide problem that requires just such a message. The idea is to provide a mirror," she explains. "Dismissing in front and amongst about misrepresentation of Black government," she says. "Wherever you are, Phase 1000000! Social distancing every time. Let's assume we are all COVID-19 positive and



workers, it is the work of film artist Naomi Kawano and her team.

The disease has prolonged Harlem's various people and institutions from medicine, the arts, education, food service, religious life and environmentalism to undertake work to help keep our community healthy, particularly in exploring the data during that the virus is disproportionately striking Black and brown communities.

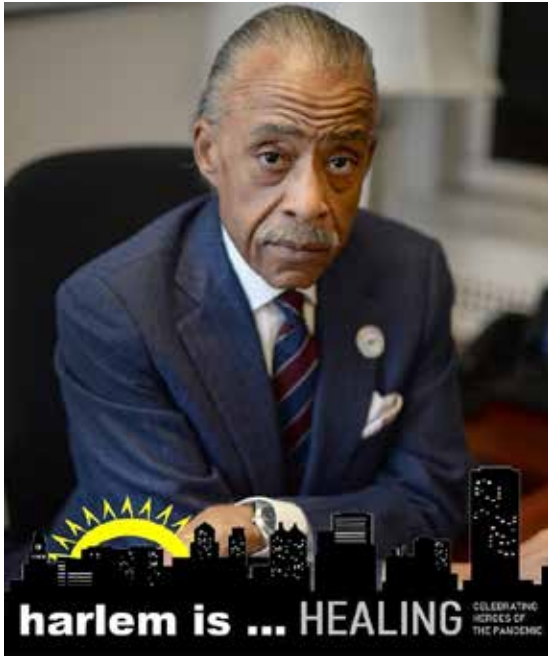
You can see these stories at <https://www.instagram.com/harlemishealing/> and at <https://www.facebook.com/CommunityWorksNYC/>.

These stories and those that follow will become part of an exhibition known collectively as *Harlem is ... Healing: The Art, Dance and Community*. A website will launch in coming weeks with a series devoted to Harlem is ... Healing. Eventually, the exhibition will complete installation at Harlem Hospital at Madison Y. Boulevard at

110th Street, where coronavirus forced delays in anything but medical treatment.

Through all of these exhibits, Community Works and New Heritage Theatre Group have maintained a consistent mission to use the arts, performance and workshops to unite communities across differences and to share the legacy of local heroes in the blossoming of a unique neighborhood we see in Harlem.

For information, please email Barbara Horowitz, Founder and President, Community Works at barbarahorowitz@communityworks.org.



harlem is... 2020 & BEYOND

Two big initiatives are shaping the future of **harlem is...** by migrating the power of community storytelling to digital platforms. First, In response to the public health crises of the coronavirus and the systemic racism exposed by the murder of George Floyd, Community Works in association with New Heritage Theatre Group launched a digital campaign to document and celebrate local people and organizations responding to the very practical and very emotional job of keeping a community in balance. The project, **harlem is... Healing: Celebrating Heroes of the Pandemic and Social Justice**, is weekly tribute posts on social media to acknowledge the healing and justice practices that sustain this beloved community and its people. The number of honorees continues to grow, but include: The **First Graduates of the CUNY Medical School**,

immediately thrown into the fray; artist **Andrea Arroyo**, whose work celebrates a community response to disease; **JJ Johnson**, a chef who has helped serve emergency workers; **Dr. Calvin Sun** and **Dr. Dara Kass**, emergency room physicians; the **Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture's** outreach to those at home; restaurateur **Melba Wilson** for her citywide efforts on behalf of restaurant owners; the nimbleness of **Dr. Steven Corwin**, CEO and President of NY Presbyterian Hospital; the community commitment of the **Rev. Al Sharpton**; **We Act**, the environmental activists; **100 Tailors of Harlem**, African immigrants from the Shabazz Center market, for work on masks and gowns; the work of young people at the **Brotherhood/Sister Sol**; Harlem Hospital nurse **Sadie Treleven**; efforts by the **Greater Harlem Chamber of Commerce** to back programs providing 1,000 meals a day; **Harlem**



Congregations Community Improvement

which is providing wellness visits and financial advice; **Michelle Bishop's Harlem Needle Arts** and **Lisa Dubois' X Gallery** for sponsoring work with artists; teen tutor **Alexis Loveraz**, **Union Settlement**, the social services agency in East Harlem; **Clayton Banks** of **Silicon Harlem** for technology help and learning; **Uplift NYC** for pivoting youth activities to deliver food; **Naomi Lawrence** and the **El Barrio Crochet Collective** and **Carmen Paulino** for public crochet projects; artist **Robin Holder**, whose paintings raise questions about response to pandemic; East Harlem restaurant **La Fonda Boricua** for working with World Central Kitchen to make meals for Metropolitan Hospital; photo artist **Tau Battice** for portraits of Harlem in time of crisis; four women undertakers at **International Funeral & Cremation Services** in Harlem who have dealt first hand with the overwhelming real problems of family and death; and the **Rev. James Forbes** for his spiritual leadership and healing words.



Visit the new digital home for **harlem is...**

Community Works/New Heritage is proud to launch the new digital home for **harlem is...**, a multimedia website—www.harlem-is.org—featuring the harlem is... timeline; a digital version of the harlem is... Music, Theater, and Dance exhibition assets honoring the landmark institutions and legacy-keepers of the arts in Harlem; learning activities and curriculum documents for schools and community groups to study harlem history online; engagement pages with the new harlem is... projects including commissioned works by visual artist Paul Deo and poet/performer Daniel Carlton; an archive of our past publications and project essays by celebrated community scholars, journalists and artists; and more. The website will be the center of our future programming activities which includes online talks, performances, and exhibitions that extend our tradition of celebrating community online where we now go to stay socially connected.



web www.harlem-is.org



facebook @communityworksnyc



instagram @harlemishealing

A tribute to the first **harlem is...** exhibition and its 30 trailblazing honorees.

All thirty of these honorees are prominently featured in our cornerstone **harlem is...** timeline on display in Harlem Hospital's Mural Pavilion.

Betty Allen
James Allen
Elois Banks
Dr. Yosef ben-Jochannan
John Bess
Warren & Marguerite Blake
Marie Brooks
Raven Chanticleer
Joe Cuba
Rosa Guy

Inge Hardison
Vy Higginsen
John Isaacs
Gertrude Jeanette
Yuri Kochiyama
Gloria Lynne
Joe Merenda
Lorraine Monroe
Albert Murray
Basil A. Paterson

Muriel Petioni
Charles Rangel
Max Roach
Tunde Samuel
The Silver Belles
Sister Miriam Cecelia
Percy E. Sutton
Grace Williams
Lloyd Williams
Ruth Williams



This tribute is dedicated to the memory of **Dr. Muriel Petioni**, a celebrated doctor and community activist in Harlem who worked tirelessly for the health and well-being of the people in Harlem, and who generously shared her inspiring life story with the school children who contributed to the making of the **harlem is...** exhibition.





harlem is...
CELEBRATING THE LIVING HISTORY OF HARLEM



*Harlem—
What
Becomes
A Legend
Most*

By Lee A. Daniels



Harlem.

On the one hand, one need say only its name—no description necessary. For the name is known the world over.

Harlem—the legendary cultural capital of Black America. Harlem—the most prominent repository (of many) of the spirit of the twentieth-century experience of Black Americans. Harlem—whose artists and residents used literature, dance, music, painting and sculpture to explore Black Americans’ relationship with not only America but the world.

And yet, one should not only say the name and leave it at that. For the story—the legend—of Harlem is even more complex and instructive than the jumble of well-known facts, events, images and famous individuals its name most often brings to minds.

Harlem became legendary because of the collision of two powerful forces in American society in the 1920s.

The first was the arrival of the modern era. This was when the psychological shock of the horrors of World War I combined with the continued movement of Americans of all kinds to the cities and the continued invention of instruments of convenience—from washing machines to automobiles to disposable razors to radio—to largely destroy the old, measured pace of life that had prevailed before the war and foster the frenzy of the decade that came to be known as “The Roaring Twenties.”

The second was the first wave of the mass movement of Black Americans out of the South, pushed by the rigidity and brutal violence of the South’s apartheid and pulled by the labor needs of the industrial North and West. These “Great Migrations” fed an explosive growth in the black population of New York (and many other urban centers).

In New York, the availability of housing there and the pervasive discrimination in the housing markets elsewhere that was narrowing housing choices for Blacks living in other parts of Manhattan rapidly made the neighborhood north of Central Park that era’s “Negro Quarter.” In 1910 Blacks comprised just 10 percent of Central Harlem. But by 1920, they were nearly one-third of its population, and by 1930 they made up 70 percent of the area’s residents.

That “critical-massing” of Black people from wildly diverse backgrounds and of greatly differing

sensibilities—in a city whose very diversity and commercial energy was itself a pressure-cooker of modernity—nurtured the New Negro Movement and the Harlem Renaissance whose “cultural products” became part of the foundation of twentieth-century American culture.

In the 1930s, the cultural renaissance continued. But the community’s future, which had once seemed to shine so brightly dimmed sharply. Harlem and its residents now had to cope with a new, pernicious “legend” as the combination of the catastrophic



Harlem is more complex and instructive than the jumble of well-known facts, events, images and famous individuals its name most often brings to minds.

economic effects of the Great Depression and pervasive public- and private-sector discrimination made it a symbol of concentrated urban poverty for decades.

So, in this moment of Harlem’s new, complicated “renaissance,” we should not forget that Harlem’s life has always been complex. We should not forget that, located in a physically beautiful space just north of Central Park, it could have disintegrated as a Black community under the pressure of the negative forces that battered it for half a century.

But it held on, it stayed together because it retained that most valuable commodity: people who considered it their home and had the skill and tenacity to fight for it. The stories of its people—exemplified by those on display in the extraordinary *harlem* is ... exhibition suggest two profound propositions: The first is that Harlem remains a place where the spiritual and physical present and future of Black Americans is being worked out, where both the sense of home and the search for home continues to be intense. And the second is that that imperative has bred in Harlem’s residents both an anxiety and a wariness, on the one hand, and, on the other, a pride and equanimity evident in all the political and cultural expressiveness that continues to make Harlem *Harlem*.

By **Sylvia L. White**
Deputy Executive Director
NYC Health+
Hospitals/Harlem

harlem is... THE HEALING POWER OF ART

NYC Health+Hospitals/Harlem (Harlem Hospital Center) is pleased and proud to partner with CommunityWorks to welcome the *harlem is...* exhibit. We extend our deep appreciation to Barbara Horowitz, Founder and President of Community Works, Board Member Voza Rivers, the Board of Directors, and the entire team at Community Works for sharing this important tribute to the history and culture of *The Village of Harlem*.

perception of what is possible. *harlem is...* reminds us of the shoulders we are standing on and inspires us to dream bigger, reach further, and climb higher.

The Harlem community has always understood the healing power of art. NYC Health+Hospitals/Harlem (Harlem Hospital Center) is home to a collection of art that reflects our Hospital's deep respect for *The Village of Harlem*. Original oil paintings, sculptures, photographs, prints, and mixed media pieces help us create a

therapeutic environment in both public spaces and patient care areas that strengthen and encourage our staff, our patients, and our visitors.

The world-class WPA Murals that grace the walls of The Mural Pavilion at NYC Health+Hospitals/Harlem are the result of the community coming together in the 1930s to empower artists Vertis Hayes, Charles Alston, Georgette Seabrooke, and Alfred Crimi to share their gifts.

In the 1960s, the sculpture by John Rhoden, entitled "The Family" at the Lenox Avenue entrance of the Martin Luther King, Jr. Pavilion, was described by one of our patients as "a warm embrace that greeted me whenever I entered the Hospital". It matters to our community that we have artwork that reflects and honors our culture.

Since 2012, the façade of The Mural Pavilion has proudly displayed panels from the WPA Mural



CommunityWorks has shared with us the stories of people who shaped our culture, as well as, those who carry on their legacy of service and strength. The *harlem is...* exhibit changes the way that our space feels and celebrates the Harlem community in a way that helps us breathe with a different type of energy. *harlem is...* demonstrates the power that art has to move us, to shift and transform our thinking, and to expand our



“The Pursuit of Happiness.” Painted by Vertis Hayes, the art displayed on the 50-foot fritted glass has become an iconic image and a cultural statement with a profound impact on the Hospital’s environment. Quite simply, it has elevated our presence in this community by making our neighborhood more beautiful.



Today, these world-class, historic pieces share space with contemporary art by Ronald A. Draper, Daryll Downes, Sir Shadow, Justine Gilzene, Ashley Ayala, Jordan Baker-Caldwell, Junior Charles, Alfred Yeagon, and Lakeisha Draper. RxArt, the non-profit organization whose mission is to help children heal through the extraordinary power of visual art, commissioned a mural from the Keith Haring Foundation which transformed the Pediatric Emergency Waiting area into an engaging and inspiring environment full of beauty, humor and comfort.

The Mahogany Exhibit showcases the prestigious Harlem Arts Alliance Group and brings together the work of thirteen photographers, some well-known and well loved, others newcomers to the field. The Exhibit features the work of O’Neal L. Abel, Kenny Anderson, Lenore Browne, Stanley Cadet, Corine Campbell, Eric Engles, Shoun A.

Hill, Lamar D. Howell, Sr., Glenda E. Jones, Jack B. Lee, III, Stephen Paul, Theresa Register, and Jonathan Wosu. The 240 photographs featured are a wonderfully rich and diverse collection of black and white and color photography, and spectacular original collages.

The artists who have shared their work with NYC Health+Hospitals/Harlem understand the significant effect their work has on our



environment. Through their art, they have become healers who have created positive images that make a difference.

The *harlem is...* exhibit joins our collection, bringing with it a unique healing influence that raises our awareness about ourselves, our community, and our culture. Thank you Community Works for helping us spread our message of healing and hope.



HARLEM ODYSSEY

An Artists' Personal Tour through a Cross-section of Harlem

By Ademola Olugebefola

(Above) **PYRAMID IN SPACE**
by Ademola Olugebefola, circa 1998, 19ft X 5ft
South Hall in historic Riverside Church
11th Annual Harlem Fine Arts Show: Feb. 13-16, 2020
Courtesy Harlem Arts Alliance

harlem is... as a purely conceptual theme could be interpreted as somewhat 'nebulous'. However, a more holistic description would be a 'Nebula', defined in my frequently used desk copy of the Oxford American Dictionary as "a bright area caused by a galaxy". The 'stars' of that galaxy are a plethora of historical and contemporary figures who have lived and/or worked in this amazing neighborhood for over a century, and to this very day educate, inspire, and energize legions of our youth and residents towards productive and successful lives. Today, cadres of cultural warriors—visual artists, poets and playwrights, musicians and composers, choreographers and dancers, quilters, jewelers and fashion designers—continue the legacy that has earned Harlem the distinctive title 'Cultural Capital Of Black America'.

As I meditated on what could I possibly convey in a short essay that would capture the

essence of my half-century plus of nonstop spiritual and creative growth, it dawned upon me that just recounting my professional artistic tenure in the Harlem community could easily be a novel-length adventure. The voluminous events and experiences that molded the essence of my Harlem experience could be summed up in the dual realities of COLLABORATIVE SYNERGY—RESPECT AND TRUST.

Join me on a journey down memory lane moving from east to west across one of Harlem's most famous streets, 125th Street renamed Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard in 1984, from Malcolm X Boulevard (formerly Lenox Avenue) to Frederick Douglas Blvd, the magical street made immortal in Duke Ellington's musical masterpiece 'Take The A Train'.

Perched on the northeast corner of 'African Square', that wide intersection where ACP Blvd and MLK Blvd meet, and diagonally across from Elombe Brath Way corner (aptly named for the international activist & co-founder of the African Jazz Art Society and Studios) stands the towering Adam Clayton Powell State Office Building built in 1973 following the tumultuous 1960's era. It anchors the southern stretch of what I like to call "The Golden Square Mile" and houses one of my early 1965 paintings, 'The Blue-Eyed Pied Piper', in the NYS permanent collection. Hop across the avenue to Popular Bank's large storefront window where you can see 'Harlem Village Odyssey', a 28-ft x 8-ft mural commissioned in 1998 depicting sheroes and heroes you might find in history books. Along this bustling commercial thoroughfare, the world-famous Apollo Theater still hosts the iconic weekly 'Amateur Night', where the mantra "Be good or be gone" still rules the stage. It is where three decades ago in 1990, Voza Rivers' New Heritage Theater asked me to create the logo design for it's daring groundbreaking LGBTQ themed play 'The Third Rhythm' premiering at the Apollo to surprised but receptive audiences.

Launched in 2006 with Abdel Salaam's Forces of Nature Dance Theater, the Apollo Theater Foundation, founded by the illustrious Percy E. Sutton, has produced the spectacular sold-out annual Kwanzaa Regeneration Night

each December. It has been my honor to present on stage at this event an original work of art to the chosen 'Family Of The Year'.

Just a few doors away, displayed at the entrance of the Red Lobster Restaurant, I pay tribute to the legendary SAVOY Ballroom with a multimedia painting entitled 'Swing Dancers'. Further west, less than a hundred yards away was the former home of the historic Frank Silvera Writers Workshop, named after the famous actor, where up the steep stairs to the second floor, I enjoyed creative collaborations with the late contemporary theater pioneer Garland Lee Thompson Sr.

As I reflect on this short journey, part one of my Harlem Odyssey, I am grateful for my good fortune to have worked with such a rich cadre of talented, wise, energetic and extraordinary men and women over the years, such as Abdul Rahman, Ed Sherman, Bob MacBeth, Voza Rivers, Cliff Frazier, Lloyd Williams, Velma Banks, Linda Walton, Minerva Diaz, Lazette McCants, Lisa DuBois, Barbara Horowitz, Marta Vega, Barbara Ann Teer, Jose' Ferrer, Dindga McCannon, Otto Neals, Donna Mason, Hal Thomas, Bob Gumbs, Playthell Benjamin, and more. I marvel at the



magnitude of the mutual gifts of so many. With each one of these special friends and associates, I have shared unique interactions and relationships within colorful vignettes of contemporary history worth remembering.

harlem is... EDUCATION

A Conversation with Deirdre Hollman and Daniel Carlton



This is an edited transcription of a reflective and spirited conversation between Deirdre Hollman and Daniel Carlton, two of Community Works' lead educators on the **harlem is...** project. Each of them conducted dozens of after school workshops with middle and high school youth who studied Harlem's history and interviewed its residents who were 'Making A Difference' in the community. This educational work formed the foundation of the **harlem is...** public art project from 2003-2015.

Deirdre Hollman: What was your experience working with young people in Harlem and helping them see the value in their community and in the people who live here?

Daniel Carlton: For me, *harlem is...* is an extension of the work I did with Community Works on The Long Walk to Freedom project, honoring ordinary people who did extraordinary things during the Civil Rights Movement. The *harlem is...* project brought the young people and I together with icons to enrich our understanding of how their love for this community propelled them to make a difference here. All of the people we talked to had a deep love for what it meant to build something here. Some of them were building because it was just the way

segregation worked, and others because they came here by way of migration and saw community needs that they wanted to address. The magnificence of Harlem that we all take for granted was explored in this project and I think for myself and the students, the project allowed us to see ourselves bigger and as potential activists, builders, and artists. So the interviews were connecting students with living forces of change, heroes and sheroes, many of whom were elders and have passed away. Our class visits may have been part of their last experiences.

DH: I agree with you, Daniel. That magnificence is sometimes an intangible quality. I remember working with kids, going on walking tours of the neighborhood, drawing streetscapes, and pointing out what the different community businesses were and meeting the owners. In so doing, one of things that was important to me was for the young people to see that Harlem was definitely bigger than the brick and mortar and the streets. Harlem is a spirit and an energy. Part of that spirit is what you are talking about, peoples' hopes and dreams and their effort and productivity, and all of that building in this place for the people of this place and for the expanded community. There is something about people coming to Harlem and wanting to create and contribute to the life of this place. That is the intangible lesson. Connecting with people to hear those stories, really makes you feel a part of it. It gives you greater access to that vibration and I think that was important for young people when they may feel disconnected from the community at large and historically. They got to learn that there is a community full of creative energy and entrepreneurial, artistic and intellectual spirit. An energy and spirit, that they could contribute to and draw from.

DC: We all discovered through this Harlem is... project that there is an accessibility even to the institutions that were built here in Harlem. Kids got to go and meet Tunde at The National Black Theater, or Voza Rivers at New Heritage Theater, or Marie Brown at her dance studio in the Hotel Teresa. I remember during that time, walking past the Studio Museum in Harlem and none of my kids had been inside. The significance of that place



was something behind the door, and Harlem is... cracked the door open and said you can come in. Knock first --

DH: Yes! Make an appointment, but welcome! (laughter) It is so true! I remember we did an interview with Joe Cuba, and we literally went with a dozen kids and sat in this OG Afro-Latin drummer's living room, and talked to him and his wife. I've always connected to how natural that felt, like a traditional way of taking the children around to visit the elders in the village. You are right about the project cracking the door open, the kids did get access to people and places that they might not have normally.

DC: We can't measure this, but I wonder how many young people have been a part of Harlem is... and been introduced to a person or a field of study and then gone on to do something in that field academically or professionally? Another thing I liked about Harlem is... was the variety of things that we investigated Harlem to be. I learned so much from Harlem is... Gospel. I had not given any of that a lot of thought. I love churches - the architecture, the spirituality - but from doing the interviews with the church leaders, I learned so much history about how the churches came to Harlem and what they were doing socially in Harlem. I had no idea there was a trombone ministry here! And the Ethiopian influence of some, and how some churches were



synagogues. The kids in Harlem have always been people who have joined Harlem, and there is an internationalism that has always been a part of this community in how the South comes here and meets Africa, and meets the Spanish and English speaking Caribbean, and the North. I think it was really important for the kids to see that they belonged in Harlem. You know when you come to Harlem as an immigrant, the church is sometimes that one place that may be familiar and the harlem is... Gospel project really helped students understand how diverse the community is.

DH: I agree, the harlem is... project really exposed the cultural, linguistic, and ethnic diversity here in Harlem. And you can't talk about that diversity just in terms of geography like East Harlem is this and West Harlem is that, it is so many layers - Afro-Cuban, Indian, Senegalese, Jamaican and more in a mix. It is a metropolis, as James Weldon Johnson called it The Black Metropolis, on the northern end of Manhattan.

DC: Yeah, this is why I don't like the language

of a single renaissance because that implies that something came, had its moment and died. Harlem, if nothing else, never died.

DH: Never died. It never died.

DC: And that is so reflective in its people, you know.

DH: I do. Are there any harlem is... honorees that stand out to you? Any one that you have a fond memory of?

DC: Because I knew most of the people involved in the harlem is... Theater project, either as a friend or a collaborator or someone I'd seen but wanted to work with, it was such a beautiful thing to see my friends and colleagues presented in such an honorable way, on a large panels with their life story and the history of their organization in a timeline. It was amazing to see them honored as a group.

DH: One story that I carry with me is actually your story with Wyatt Tee Walker.

DC: Wasn't he part of The Long Walk to Freedom project?

DH: He was but he overlapped because he was also at the helm of Canaan Baptist Church in Harlem. Do you remember the story you told?

DC: Yes, I actually retold this story to a group of youth I was working with and one of them happened to be his granddaughter! We were talking about Harlem and she said her grandfather had a church here, his name was the Reverend Dr. Wyatt Tee Walker. And I told her I'd met him once and I told her the story that he told me and the harlem is... students about how he was with Dr. King and although he believed in the principles of non-violence, he did not quite trust that the people Dr. King was trying to save would abide by those principles, so he kept himself "ready". She then told me how she went home and shared that story with her parents and it opened up a whole conversation in the family about a side of her grandfather she had never known. He was such an amazing person on so many levels. Putting youth in touch with him and the other honorees, really opened up history to them.

DH: My sentimental moment was in that first segment of the harlem is... project that focused on 30 elders in the community. In that group was the historian Dr. Ben Jochanan and a few years after he was interviewed by the youth, I moved into his building in Lenox Terrace. We became very neighborly and he always looked for my son and would drop dimes of wisdom on him like the true village seba (teacher) he was. As an educator myself, and also as a human being, and a black person, to be able to celebrate the rich contributions of these folks while they were still living, to sit the youth at their feet to learn about African civilization and also to just laugh and smile with them, it was really a gift. I remember for harlem is... Music we sent students to go and visit Max Roach just a short while before he passed away.

DC: Dr. Muriel Petione at Harlem Hospital would be someone high on my list too. She was

"Harlem is a spirit and an energy. Connecting with people to hear those stories, really makes you feel a part of it. It gives you greater access to that vibration and I think that is important for young people."

—Deirdre Hollman



extraordinary and such an amazing storyteller. The way she described how she came to this community and saw a need for health care among the people which directed her career in medicine. She told us how she basically put out a sign when she opened her practice and waves of people flocked to her for care. She cared for the health of this community for over 60 years! That's extraordinary. Just hearing her story of how she witnessed this community evolve over decades through all the ups and downs. She was a living treasure and so giving of her story.

DH: Any revelatory moments with your students that you recall?

DC: harlem is... connected me with the students in my community in a special way. One kid lived across the street, Savion was his name. Savion and his class went with me to interview Piri Thomas, the author of *Down These Mean Streets*. One day he stopped me on the street and he wanted to talk about that experience. He walked to the park with me and my son, and it turned into a daylong conversation. I learned that he was a writer but he didn't want anybody at school to know, that he was struggling with gang stuff, and that he had never read a book all the way through to the end until he read Piri Thomas. He wanted to share with me how blessed he thought he was to have had that experience to meet him and the impact it had

on him. So the shared experience of harlem is... created a bond between me and one of the kids in my community.

DH: That's beautiful and it speaks to the fact that the teaching artists and educators who worked on the harlem is... project were part of the community too, and were able to anchor the experience of doing community histories with the students they served. For many of us working on this, it was a passion project. I think about Benja and Jade and other teaching artists who lived on the very streets we were teaching from.

DC: Another honoree I loved was Vy Higgensen! She is a gospel theater pioneer who made it big on Broadway but never left the community. She built The Mama Foundation here on 126th Street.

DH: And Raven Chanticleer! He created the African American Wax Museum in his brownstone...



DC: I think the theatrical people are so memorable!

DH: Yes! And for me, as someone who collected the grand stories of the honoree visits from all the teaching artists and students, I sometimes feel like your stories are my own memories. I guess that is how good storytelling works, right? Just from debriefing with you and Madaha, I feel like I met him, but I never met him. He was magical.

DC: That's what's beautiful about Harlem. I mean all of these people, who we are talking about, came to this community because they were forced to live uptown for lack of access to living other places. Yet and still, they took a pot, a rock, two twigs and made an amazing soup. You know that story? They made something out of nothing. And no matter what happens, the record shows that the soup was made here. And with a project like harlem is... those stories don't sit there inert, harlem is... keeps those stories alive, for generations. The kids who met these Harlem residents and wrote their stories in poems, and plays, and in thank-you letters, those kids carry that history with them now and they are probably 20 or 30 years old now.

DH: When you talk about the written reflections, I remember that we asked the honorees themselves to reflect on what harlem is to them and one of the most resounding responses was HARLEM IS HOME. It speaks to that phenomenon you are talking about, how black people made a home out of this place. I mean, we are a dispossessed people and that we have these places, these little spots across this country, Harlem is one of them, where we made a community that was ours is significant. And we made it ours, not just by occupying it, but by investing in it, creating business, creating culture, raising generations of families, and creating educational and cultural institutions, and erecting artistic spaces, theaters, museums, live music venues, restaurants, houses of worship -- all of that sacred activity to create a homeland of sorts. Not to overlook the indigenous people who were here first, we are all on their land, but the threat to this sacred space that is Harlem, the cultural Mecca of the black world, is real with commercialization and gentrification. So, a project like harlem is... is an important part of preserving and sustaining the black presence, the story of black people in this community called Harlem.

DC: Yeah, if I had a wish for a story we could have told through harlem is..., it would be Harlem in the 1980s. There was a whole other cultural war



being waged at that time, especially with the Drug Wars, yet there were people in this community who were resilient and continued to build institutions, make art, open business, and they triumphed.

DH: Yes, that would be a great project. There is some of the hip-hop story in harlem is... Music, but you are right, folks like Dapper Dan. He is a legend.

DC: Yeah and Harlemworld, it is up to us to tell these stories. These honorees were not looking for us to come.

DH: No, you need folks from the community to document the stories and deposit in an archive, like our beloved Schomburg Center, so that our cultural memory is retained and new histories can be written in the future that includes us - includes folks like you, Daniel Carlton, the poet, playwright, actor, producer, public historian that you are!

DC: Aw, thank you, Deirdre.

DH: Seriously, I want there to be a box in the manuscripts division at Schomburg filled with your Harlem haikus and your plays! From my experience working as Director of Education and Exhibitions at the Schomburg, I really took to heart the mission of collecting and preserving history that was undertaken by Arturo Schomburg, Gene Blackwell Hutson, and all the archivists in the past and those there presently. harlem is... contributes to this documentary and educational tradition. It is important work.

DC: I hope that people can continue to be educated and healed by these stories through harlem is... at Harlem Hospital. Just a glimpse of the art and images in harlem is... has the power to fortify you. I hope that the exhibit continues to serve the community from such an important intersection in the heart of Harlem.

DH: I agree. Harlem Hospital is a landmark and it provides a living permanence to the harlem is... exhibition.



harlem is...

ME

by

The Youth of IMPACT Repertory Theater
with Dietrice Bolden

**Harlem is beauty
Shades of brown from gold and copper crowns to the
mahogany wood where we bless the ground
Sienna symphonies entangled in blues sounds
Harlem is culture
For the culture
From the history
His and her story hidden between brown stones
Bright stars across Apollo
Hand rubbed wood in my bones
Harlem is Unity
Knowledge bestowed upon you and me
Me
Flipped upside-down until we see we
Where we plant ourselves in places and grow opportunities,
so our seeds are pollinated and extend beyond our reach
Harlem is unique
One of a kind
Blows my mind
Magic like Johnson movie theatres painting murals
of sunshine inside
It is the music and art that beats our heart
A beat keeping us in sync, so we know we're never far apart from
another sister or brother ready for the revolution to start
Harlem is a Safe Space
As I sit in a safe space
Helmet on, oxygen tanked, courageous and
safe to explore this place
And explore my own possibility to make and be history
Tattooed in the lining of me like 80s graffiti
That reads
I am Harlem
And Harlem is me**

acknowledgements

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Michael Cummings, Brazilian Love Goddess (2004)

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