

harlem is... THEATER

1821 to **NOW**

Theater is a way to explore and express our humanity with all the unvarnished simplicity and intricate complexity we can devise to try to understand ourselves and the world we inhabit. That is why black theater in Harlem has been so vital, and why the story of black theater in Harlem remains so captivating. It is because the black experience in America has been and remains the touchstone of what it means to be an American and because Harlem, for more than a century, has been the exemplar of what it means to be a black American.

That is not, of course, to deny or denigrate the importance of black Americans' achievements and pride of place in their communities throughout the land. Indeed, that reality underscores the role Harlem took on in the early twentieth century as The Capital of Black America. Harlem became both a physical place and an idea: A place where black Americans could live most freely and fully as Americans; where all who lived within its borders could pursue achievement in whatever field of endeavor they chose. Harlem was the idea, the hope, the determination to bring into being throughout America many other places in which black Americans could find a sense of comfort, joy, inspiration and community.

Black theater in Harlem was and remains central to the creation, projection and maintenance of that idea because theater in Harlem has been such a communal enterprise. The people of Harlem have always had so much they want to say about their experience—about the space between the idea of Harlem and the reality of Harlem. Which is to say, between the idea of America and the reality of America. That discussion still permeates Harlem's environment and still gives the neighborhood its distinctive quality, even amid its demographic change. Harlem is grounded in blackness; black theater in Harlem is one of the major forces that made it so. And it will continue to be so as long as there are within its borders institutions and organizations and individuals who mine its past and present black experience and prepare its residents to pursue that old idea: achieving the full measure of their humanity.

Lee A. Daniels

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A Decade Later

The community of Harlem has a distinct and unparalleled history steeped in black arts and culture. As the Harlem community continues to change, it is critically important that the countless contributions and the artistic voices of this community be recognized, honored and preserved, not only in Harlem itself but throughout New York City. A decade after **harlem is...**

THEATER opened in 2005 at the Museum of the City of New York, the exhibition still resonates and is so relevant. How proud we are to expand this exhibition and its public programs, taking it across the city and beyond.

Barbara Horowitz

*Founder & President
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