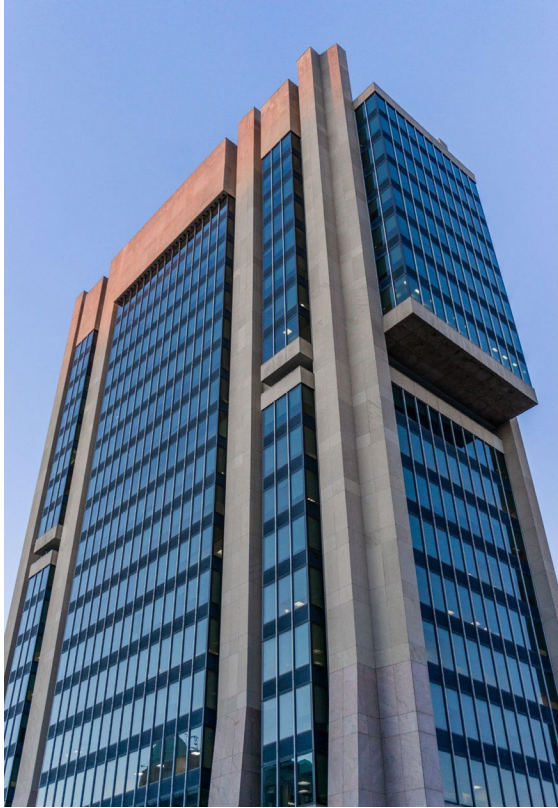


Adam Clayton Powell Jr. State Office Building

Individual Landmark

163 West 125th Street



Adam Clayton Powell Jr. State Office Building. Photo by Lorraine Colbert.

The Adam Clayton Powell Jr. State Office Building is a 19-story office building located on West 125th Street, at the corner of Adam Clayton Powell Jr. Boulevard. It is named for Adam Clayton Powell Jr., the first African American elected to the United States Congress from New York, and a former pastor of the Abyssinian Baptist Church. The building was designed by the African American architect Percy C. Ifill of the firm Ifill Johnson Hanchard, in the shape of an African mask in the Brutalist style. Percy C. Ifill and his firm also designed the Mount Morris Park Swimming Pool and Bathhouse in Harlem, and Harlem's Freedom National Bank and Carver Savings Bank.

The building is the tallest in Harlem, overtaking the nearby Hotel Theresa. It was proposed in 1966 by then-New York State Governor Nelson Rockefeller, as the beginning of development to turn Harlem into a "truly viable community." Ground was broken in 1967 with the demolition of the Corn Exchange Bank building and buildings housing several beloved neighborhood businesses. In 1969, work was halted on the project as a result of demonstrations objecting to the racial makeup of the construction workforce, and the intended purpose of the facility. The dispute was resolved by the mid 1970s, and work resumed on the site. The building was completed in 1973 and was originally named the Harlem State Office Building.

While the building was criticized for lacking basic requirements, such as a building manager and fire equipment, the location hosted Harlem's first giant Christmas tree in 1978. In 1983, the building was renamed the Adam Clayton Powell Jr. State Office Building. In 1994, the building was threatened with closure due to budget cuts, however, it remained open.

Over the years, the building has been criticized as an example of mediocre government architecture, and as the "killer building," a product of the urban renewal movement of the 1960s that "disfigured" the neighborhood. However, others have embraced it as helping to focus the community's efforts in future development battles.