

Central Harlem West 130th-132nd Streets Historic District

Historic District

West 130th-132nd Streets between Malcolm X and Adam Clayton Powell Jr. Boulevards

Designation Date: May 29, 2018



164, 166, and 168 West 130th Street. New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission Central Harlem West 130th-132nd Streets Historic District Designation Report. Photo by Barrett Reiter (LPC). March 2018.

The Central Harlem West 130th-132nd Streets Historic District consists of approximately 164 properties, primarily row houses with a handful of apartment and institutional buildings, located on the mid-blocks of West 130th, West 131st, and West 132nd Streets, between Malcolm X and Adam Clayton Powell Boulevards. Constructed during the speculative building boom that created Central Harlem's row house neighborhoods in the late 19th century, this highly intact district illustrates not only the architectural development of Harlem, but the rich social, cultural, and political life of Harlem's African American population in the 20th century.

Development within the district occurred rapidly in the final decades of the 19th century as transportation and infrastructure improvements made Harlem an attractive neighborhood for New Yorkers looking to escape the overcrowding of Lower Manhattan. Central Harlem

became a residential enclave for the middle and upper-middle class at the close of the nineteenth century. In less than two decades, architects like Cleverdon & Putzel, Charles Baxter, and William J. Merritt built row houses with standardized designs and materials, primarily in the neo-Grec style, filling the once empty blocks with single-family homes sold to families of Dutch, German, and English heritage.

By the turn of the century, Harlem began to attract middle-class African American families moving north to escape the conditions of New York's Tenderloin District, which historically was one of the few areas open to black families. The Central Harlem West 130th-132nd Streets Historic District remained almost exclusively white through the 1910s, but by the 1920s the neighborhood was primarily a middle-class African American neighborhood.

The concentration of academics, reverends, doctors, activists, artists, actors, and musicians created the conditions that made this area home to an impressive variety of cultural, religious, civic, and political activity. Professional and social organizations such as the New Amsterdam Musical Association (NAMA), which is the oldest African American musical association in the United States, and the Alpha Physical Culture Club, the first all black athletic club in the United States, sought to meet the needs of a community that was kept out of the equivalent "white-only" groups of Manhattan.

As a microcosm of the African American experience in greater Harlem, the district is not only significant for its contributions to the social and political history of the immediate area, but to the nation as a whole, due to its role as the location of the planning headquarters for the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. This event was instrumental in spurring the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

Today, the Central Harlem West 130th-132nd Streets Historic District is not only a significant enclave of residential architecture representative of Central Harlem's first major phase of development, but a remarkable reminder of the substantial role that the African American community of Harlem played in creating political and social change in New York City and the nation.

[Read the full NYC LPC designation report here.](#)

[Read testimonies supporting the designation here.](#)

[Central Harlem Historic District Approved by City Council](#)

Designation of the Central Harlem West 130th-132nd Street Historic District, in its entirety, received unanimous approval in the City Council on Wednesday, September 26! This was a monumental victory for the community, and Save Harlem Now! (SHN!), which struggled against the efforts of two prominent lobbying firms that were hired to convince Council Members that a garage located on 132nd Street be excluded from the Historic District.



West 131st Street, South Side, Barrett Reiter (LPC), 2017

[LPC Designates A Historic District in Central Harlem](#)

NEW YORK – Today, the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC) designated the Central Harlem – West 130-132nd Streets Historic District. This mid-block historic district is not only representative of Central Harlem’s residential architecture, but the rich social, cultural, and political life of its African American population in the 20th century. To illustrate the significance of this diverse historic district, LPC launched an interactive story map called [Explore the Central Harlem – West 130th-132nd Streets Historic District](#).

[The Central Harlem West 130th-132nd Street Historic District Has Its Public Hearing](#)

LANDMARK WEST! joined our neighbors from Harlem today to rally for the designation of [the Central Harlem West 130th-132nd Street Historic District](#). Our statement, which can be read [here](#), expressed our solidarity with our Harlem colleagues in calling for the proposed historic district to be designated. The hearing was attended by a wide array of community leaders, representatives for elected officials, members of venerated Harlem institution the [New Amsterdam Musical Association](#), and members of the preservation community.

[Landmark Preservation Commission Approves Designated Central Harlem Blocks ~ Let’s Take a Walk](#)

[The New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission \(LPC\)](#) designated the Central Harlem ~ West 130-132nd Street between Lenox Avenue and Adam Clayton Powell Jr Blvd a Historic District on May 29, 2018, and approved that proposal on September 27, 2018, when a full City Council vote took place.