

Young Men's Christian Association Building, 135th Street Branch

Individual Landmark

180 West 135th Street

Designation Date: February 10, 1998



Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) Building,
West 135th Street Branch, (now Jackie Robinson YMCA Youth Center)
181 West 135th Street, (aka 179-183 West 135th Street)
Photo: Theresa C. Noonan

The Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) Building, West 135th Street Branch, was constructed in 1931-1932 according to plans prepared by the Architectural Bureau of the National Council of the YMCA, and to the design and supervision of architect James C. Mackenzie, Jr. This branch was the successor to the "Colored Men's Branch" of the YMCA, located on West 53rd Street between 1901 and 1919, and the West 135th Street Branch YMCA, built in 1918-1919 at No. 181, across the street from the later building.

African American YMCAs were the result of the YMCA's official policy of racial segregation, from the organization's beginnings in the United States in 1851 until 1946. Though excluded from white YMCAs, African Americans were encouraged to form separate branches, which became autonomous community centers. The 135th Street Branch YMCA, partially funded by John D. Rockefeller, Jr., Julius Rosenwald, and the Phelps-Stokes Fund, was called at the time of its completion the largest such facility for African American men and boys, as well as one of the best-equipped YMCA buildings in the United States.

Eleven stories, and clad in brick with neo-Georgian style details, the YMCA is C-shaped in plan above the four-story base, has setbacks, and is dominated by a tower that continues to be a major presence in the Harlem skyline. In 1936, the name of the West 135th Street Branch was officially changed to the Harlem Branch YMCA. It has served as one of Harlem's most important recreational and cultural centers, and has been a significant purveyor of safe and affordable accommodations. Over the years the "Y" has had associations with many notable figures in the Harlem and African American communities. The facility is known today as the Harlem YMCA.

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