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Radical Preservation
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The African Square Intersection is an urban crossroad, located where Martin Luther King Blvd (125th Street) and Adam Clayton Powell Blvd (7th Avenue) meet. This intersection connotes the memories and efforts of past and current heroes who challenge the public memory and assumptions of their community. Conceptually, this intersection contains an important piece of the history and cultural representation of 125th Street. Along with the important monuments that surround it such as the Adam Clayton Powell Office Building, Hotel Theresa and Studio Museum and even street names, the African Square Intersection embraces the ‘blackness’ of the community and Harlem. It ensures that the future generations will see this intersection and be reminded of its origin and the sacrifices that it took to arrive in its present form. The connection between this intersection and radical preservation lies in the effort to resist becoming a typical commercial district and to push back against rising gentrification.

This intersection has been walked on by the community’s core voices, both past and present. Influential protests such as the George Floyd protests, the Harlem Rezoning protests, Malcolm X protests and much more have been held in this intersection and surrounding streets, as well as the surrounding buildings.



Powell looking towards Hotel Theresa



125th Street looking east

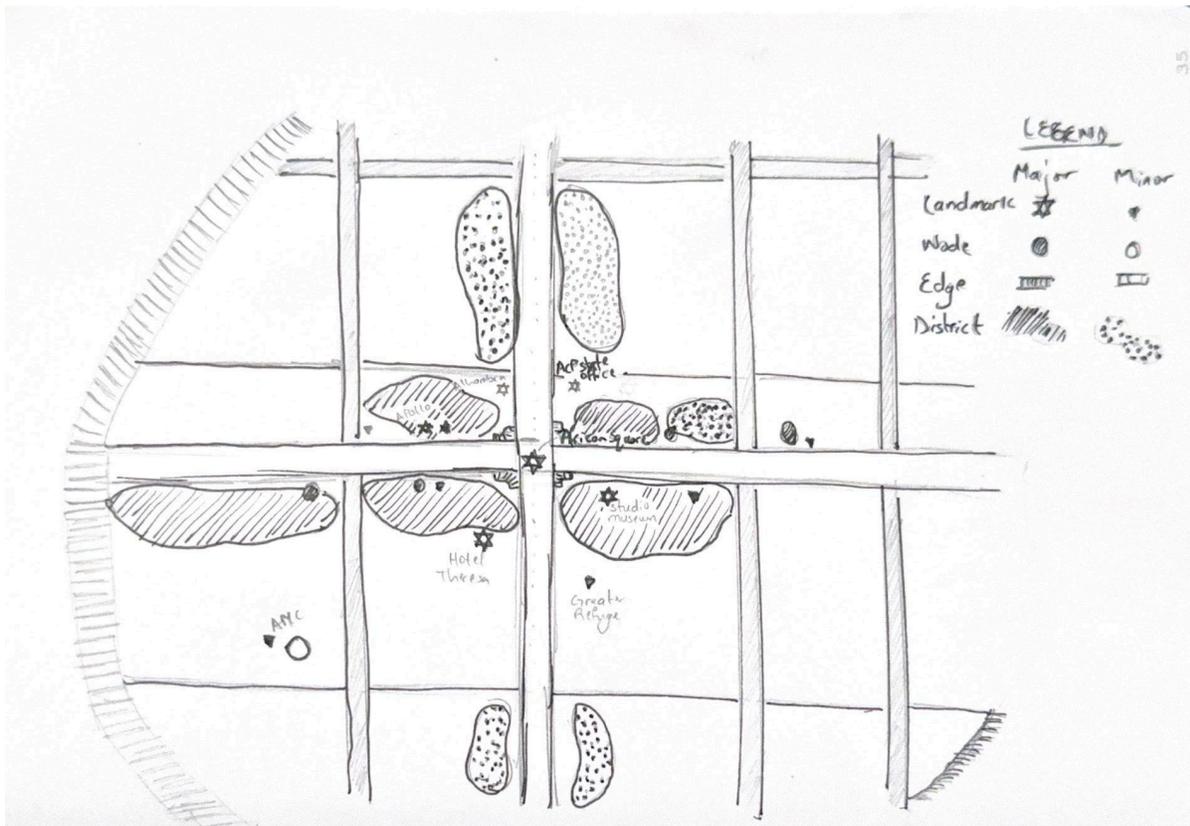


View from African Square Intersection

In her book titled Mapping Malcolm, Najha Zigbi-Johnson describes the goals and accomplishments of an influential black figure, Malcolm X. She stated that “Malcolm believed that along

with the physical chains of slavery, we also had to remove the chains placed on our minds.” In the context of the African Square Intersection, this means that the black community can not settle for less, especially in such a place like Harlem that has been the home to many African Americans for centuries. Influential crossroads such as the African Square Intersection has to maintain its heritage and presence because it is the keystone of monuments that will withstand the test of time.

The contamination of Harlem is at stake, and these contaminants include gentrification, poor physical space representation, and standardization of Harlem with other typical commercial districts. Upon visiting African Square Intersection and the surrounding blocks, I drew an imagability map from memory and I noticed how many landmarks and commercial nodes I walked past along 125th street. There is a growing amount of businesses and retail stores making the 125th street corridor economically stronger. However, the critical issue remains on how would this corridor support these businesses while also maintaining its status as an integral cultural corridor. Obviously, the capitalism has brought more attention to the area but it has also given the community leverage so that they can voice their opinion in a tangible and crucial part of the built environment; it would be devastating to lose the ground that they have to a creeping “redevelopment”



In conclusion, the African Square Intersection is a living archive of Harlem's cultural resilience, political struggles and community identity. Its monuments, protests, urban fabric and unique narratives affirm the need for radical preservation. The futurity and blackness of the community has to remain invulnerable to the erasure threatened by developers and businesses controlled by capitalistic gains. The African Square intersection and its surrounding built environment has an important role to play in this preservation because they, physically and figuratively, anchor the 125th corridor.