

THE HARLEM YMCA

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YMCA Building in 2024



Early site in 1932



Located in upper Manhattan between Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. and Malcolm X Boulevards, The 135th Street YMCA, a soaring red and brown brick structure with a distinctive red and white neon sign was built between 1931 and 1932. Black YMCA was 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 the white YMCAs, Blacks were encouraged to form separate branches, which became important educational, religious, recreational and cultural centers. It provided a meeting place for numerous groups, including prominent 20th-century politicians, writers, and speakers who advocated for the African-American community and opposed segregation.

PRESERVATION OF HISTORY

Harlem YMCA building is a great example of radical preservation that goes beyond maintaining historic buildings. It recognizes the importance of the people and location that served as the hub of African Americans' intellectual, cultural, and social life for the advancement of 20th-century African American history. Today, despite that, the Harlem neighborhood has seen an unprecedented amount of change, where Luxury towers and a wave of generic apartment buildings have replaced cultural landmarks. The YMCA is one of the buildings that has remained standing from being culturally, and historically erased over the years. Instead it's heritage has been preserved by continuing to serve the area's multicultural neighborhoods. The building that one day became the epicenter of Black America continues to take care of the most vulnerable groups in their community and at the same time welcome newcomers.