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## Victoria Theater

The Victoria Theater was once among the most significant cultural landmarks in Harlem. This ornate venue on 125th Street became part of the Loew's theater chain in 1917 and could seat more than 2,400 guests—one of the many reasons it quickly rose to prominence. Situated in the heart of Harlem, the theater soon became a vital gathering place for the community. More than just a site for vaudeville acts and plays, the Victoria offered Black audiences a space that rivaled the grandeur of downtown Manhattan theaters. Importantly, during the Jim Crow era, the theater resisted segregationist practices, serving instead as a safe haven for the Black community. By the 1960s and 70s, it had also become a screen for independent Black cinema, reflecting the growing demand for representation in film. In 1977, the Victoria closed, a casualty of both the rise of television and the broader economic disinvestment in Harlem. It remained abandoned for decades, until a 2017 renovation transformed its interior into a mixed-use complex that includes permanent housing, a hotel, a restaurant, and an extension of the Apollo Theater known as the Apollo Stages. While the redevelopment might appear to honor the theater's legacy, many Harlem residents questioned its authenticity. To some, the project exemplifies how Black history is commodified: the building's touristic façade was preserved, but the deeper community memory and cultural significance risk being erased. Advocates of **radical preservation** argue that the goal is not merely to maintain the appearance of historic structures, but to sustain the stories, traditions, and cultural life they once nurtured. Though the Apollo Stages represent a meaningful addition, they cannot fully capture the immense historical and cultural richness the Victoria Theater once embodied for Harlem.