



Developed site in 2024



Rendered proposal in 2012



Early site in 20XX

The National Urban League (NUL) building development has become a controversial topic in Harlem, the raising concern is about gentrification. The building is located on 125th Street between Adam Clayton Powell Jr. Boulevard and Lenox Avenue, the building was designed by Beyer Blinder Belle and developed by BRP Companies, Dabar Development, L+M Development Partners, Taconic Partners, and the Prusik Group. The criticism here is while the NUL project aims to revitalize the area by offering amenities like a civil rights museum and affordable housing, it might contribute to the displacement of long-time residents and small businesses. Increasing property values, supporting capitalism, and potentially transferring the role of preservation of the site's historical value.

Intangible History

The building's ground floor and basement levels have been completed and are now open to the public, offering commercial spaces for rent. Notable tenants include Trader Joe's, Target, and Sephora. However, the development has sparked controversy within the local community. Opinions about the interior design of these commercial spaces are divided, particularly regarding their attempt to reflect Harlem's cultural and physical identity. For instance, Trader Joe's aims to connect with Harlem's culture by incorporating local elements into its interior design, such as graffiti-inspired artwork and a brick façade. The store manager stated, "The sign and murals in the store are something that we really do pride ourselves on, to make sure that it is connecting with the community." On the other hand, critics argue that such efforts constitute cultural appropriation. As one detractor put it, "It's a shame how colonizers fled Harlem when WE showed up, ignored the neighborhood through generations of poverty, the heroin era, and the crack era—only to return, push us out, and alter the landscape..."

This debate highlights a broader issue: the commercialization and dilution of cultural heritage when large-scale developments bring in corporate and tourist interests. While these efforts may claim to honor the community, they risk alienating the very people they intend to celebrate.