

FOOD SECTION



Strivers' Row is actually two rows of beautifully restored brownstones between Lenox Avenue and Powell Boulevard in Harlem. Most of the buildings are owned and occupied by middle-class Black professionals who are returning to Harlem in growing numbers.



The Apollo theater is a treasured landmark of Harlem. For more than half a century it has played host to every major Black singer, dancer and comedian. Many, including Ella Fitzgerald and Sarah Vaughn got their first professional engagements as a result of appearances on amateur night at the Apollo.



St. David AME Zion Church in Sag Harbor, L.I.N.Y., dates from 1840. The church was built by Black seamen and fishermen with the help of local Indians. Residents of Sag Harbor are working to have it declared a national landmark.

Black History New York Style

by Robert H. Elliott

Mention Southern cooking to almost anyone, and they'll know what you mean. Talk about New Orleans or Southwestern cooking, and they'll know what to expect.

But what do you get when you visit family and friends in New York, the Big Apple?

Is there such a thing as a New York style in home cooking? Is there anything special about soul food across 110th Street?

Those were the questions in the minds of the people from Kraft when they journeyed to New York to research an article in their series on the Heritage of Black Cooking in America.

They found that the cooking traditions in New York reflect the city itself—wide-ranging and cosmopolitan. Black cooking in New York is the product of a complex heritage and a variety of sources.

This does not exactly fit the image some people hold about Black people in New York. They see more than a million Black souls squeezed into a small area at the north end of Manhattan: "This place is called Harlem. It is the Black capital of America. All Blacks in New York live there. You take the A train to get to Sugar Hill way up in Harlem. You have to take the A train because no taxi will take you there."

The myth lives in part as the backwash of a remarkable period in the '20s and '30s that is variously known as the Black Renaissance, the Negro Renaissance and the Harlem Renaissance. But Harlem and Blacks had a lot of history long before then.

The first Blacks arrived in New York in the 17th and 18th centuries as indentured servants from England and Africa. Some came as slaves during New York's brief flirtation with slavery.

tion with slavery.

In the years between the Revolution and the Civil War, Manhattan and the surrounding boroughs became a haven for free men and escaped slaves. It was a center of the abolitionist movement, though not quite as active as Philadelphia and Boston.

By the end of the Civil War, there were substantial numbers of Blacks living throughout the area. In the years that followed, their numbers increased slowly but steadily, and they settled in small communities in all parts of the city.

At that time, the area north of Central Park was largely rural farmland and generally inaccessible. In the last part of the century, good roads and public transportation made it an attractive residential area. By the turn of the century, most of the farms were gone and the good burghers who settled the area named it Harlem, after the river that forms its north border.

Harlem is bordered on the east by the East River, by Eighth Avenue on the west and 110th Street on the south, although many people use the name to cover the entire area north of 110th, Columbia University and Morningside Heights excepted.

As the 20th century opened, Harlem was a stable, prosperous community, if not necessarily the wealthiest or fanciest.

The first Black families were almost unnoticed when they settled in the community. That changed, however, in 1903 when an enterprising real estate broker began filling up whole apartment buildings and rows of buildings with Black families, who had recently moved from the South. Some of the white neighbors panicked.

At the same time, the practice of

placing restrictive covenants on entire neighborhoods was growing across the nation. It had the effect of squeezing almost all of the new Black migrants into Harlem. By the time of World War I, Harlem was almost entirely Black.

In the years after the war, there was a cultural explosion in Harlem, an outpouring of literature and music by and about Black people that has been unequalled anywhere in its quantity, quality and effect on American life and art.

Poets such as Claude McKay, Countee Cullen and Langston Hughes caught the eye and ear of the world. Novels, criticism and essays flowed from the pens of Hughes, McKay, W.E.B. DuBois, Jean Toomer, E. Franklin Frazier, Alain Locke, Arthur A. Schomburg and others.

Schomburg amassed a collection of the work of the Renaissance and earlier periods. It became the basis for the nation's largest collection of literary works by and about Black Americans. Today the collection is housed in the Harlem branch of the New York Public Library that is named for Schomburg.

The literature of the Renaissance made an important and lasting contribution to American life, but the most visible effects were in music and the performing arts.

Harlem supported between six and eight theater companies at various times during that period. They performed works in the standard repertory and new plays by Black writers.

The commercial Broadway theater preferred works about Blacks from white playwrights, so many of the Black playwrights withered from neglect.

Black actors were more fortunate and performers such as Paul Robeson, Ethel Waters, Charles Gilpin, and Richard B. Harrison made it to stardom on the Broadway stage.

The real pride of Harlem in those days was two night clubs and a theater: Small's Paradise, the Cotton Club and the Apollo. They featured the brightest and best Black musicians, singers and comics of the day. The Cotton Club in particular became famous as the place where the Duke Ellington orchestra first caught national attention and Lena Horne performed as a showgirl.

The Cotton Club was a favorite place for wealthy whites from Downtown to go slumming. Very few Black residents of Harlem ever saw the inside of the place. They weren't very welcome, and the prices were sky high.

Anyway, their hearts belonged to the Apollo. They were welcome there, and they could afford it.

The Apollo was home to every prominent Black entertainer from the Twenties right up to the Sixties, when, like everything else in Harlem, it fell on bad times.

In those four decades, the Apollo spawned more talent than any comparable place in America. There is a saying among Black entertainers: "If you haven't made it at the Apollo, you haven't made it. If you can make it at the Apollo, you can make it anywhere."

The audiences at the Apollo are tough. A lot of big names have been booed off the Apollo stage. And a lot of stars have been created there. Billie Holiday, Ella Fitzgerald and Sarah Vaughn were all discovered on Apollo amateur nights.

It was not too difficult to believe that Harlem was all of Black New York.

Yet, even at the height of the Renaissance, Blacks were living and thriving in other areas of New York, generally in smaller, satellite ghettos.

All of these communities maintained a measure of economic stability because the pattern of racial segregation enforced economic integration in the ghettos. Well-to-do and welfare families lived in close proximity even if not in social intimacy. That helped the community survive if not thrive, but it was not enough for what was coming.

During the Depression and World War II, very little was done to expand the housing supply in Harlem.

The heavy influx of new residents from the South during and after the war turned Harlem into a pressure cooker.

After the war, the development of integrated public housing throughout the five boroughs relieved some of the pressure. But not enough. At the same time, the lifting of restrictive covenants made it easier for Blacks with means to live almost anywhere they chose. They chose not to live in Harlem. Its feeble economic base disappeared.

In the Seventies, Harlem looked and felt like a war zone. It was a place where almost no one went un-

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BLACK HISTORY '82

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The AME Zion cemetery in Sag Harbor is just across the road from St. David AME Zion Church. Like the church, it was created by and for the families of Black seamen and fishermen who lived in Sag Harbor before the Civil War. It is possible to read the history of Sag Harbor's Black community on the ancient stones of this cemetery.