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PUBLICATION

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# PRESS RELEASE

## FOUR NOTABLES HONORED IN HARLEM HERITAGE MARKERS PROJECT

### Dignitaries, Celebrities, and Family Members Attend and Offer Remarks at the Unveilings

*Harlem, New York, August 13, 2023* – Today the Harlem community was joined by many celebrities and dignitaries to honor the legacy of four notables who have made significant contributions to New York City and the world at-large.

**SIGNS OF THE TIMES: Harlem Heritage Markers Project** is an initiative launched by **While We Are Still Here, Inc.**, a heritage-preservation organization, founded in 2015. This year, there will be seven dedications during the months of September and November. The remainder of the 25 markers will be dedicated and installed throughout various locations in 2024. The initiative is intended to honor individuals, organizations and events that imbue Harlem with its unique character.

The unveiling occurred in four locations where guests were transported by bus.

**Marcus Garvey's** marker was unveiled at 2395 Frederick Douglas Boulevard the site of the Marcus Garvey Meeting Hall, named after the founder of the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA). Garvey was born in Jamaica and upon arriving to New York City at the age of 29 in 1916 became an early proponent of Pan-Africanism. He was a prolific traveler to African diasporic communities in Costa Rica, Honduras, Ecuador, Colombia, Venezuela, Panama, and Great Britain and had also toured Glasgow, Paris, Monte Carlo, Boulogne, and Madrid. While in these countries, he observed and experienced the overwhelming poverty, lack of rights, and exploitation of Black people. He took action wherever he traveled, sometimes by founding newspapers, encouraging unionism, or writing magazine articles. He also called for the end of white colonial rule in Africa. Current members of the UNIA offered remarks at the unveiling. Actor Eon Grey performed an excerpt from a Garvey speech titled "The Principles of the Universal Negro Improvement Association."

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The marker for **El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz**, more commonly known as **Malcolm X**, was unveiled at 1763 Amsterdam Avenue the original location of Faith Temple Church where his funeral was held in 1965. Not only did Malcolm X change the image and determination of Black Americans forever, but he was a global phenomenon, touching people wherever he traveled. Even more astonishing is that his lasting influence on the world's perception of race, justice, humanity, and equality was accomplished at a very young age and in just a few short years. He was assassinated at the young age of 39 as he spoke at a meeting of his newly formed Organization of Afro-American Unity (OAAU). At Faith Temple Church, thousands gathered at his funeral as he was eulogized by actor and activist Ossie Davis. Actor, director, musician, writer and teacher Keith Edward Johnston performed an excerpt of Malcolm X's speech "There's a Worldwide Revolution Going On."

**J. Rosamond Johnson** is known as one of the most prolific African American composers. His marker will be located at 437 W. 162<sup>nd</sup> Street. The maestro was also a musicologist, arranger, teacher, pianist, soldier, actor, and producer. He serenaded audiences with his own songs and the rich, complex melodies of spirituals and plantation songs. Mr. Johnson understood that "negro" music was one of the few styles that were truly an American invention. He was an early proponent of this perspective and is one of the people of his era to foster the idea that the distinctive music of Black slaves is worthy of having a permanent place in American music history. Melanie Edwards, Mr. Johnson's granddaughter, offered enlightening perspectives on her grandfather as she sat on the steps of her childhood home. She was joined by radio and podcast host Terrence McKnight who shared his insights on Johnson's impact on Black music.

**Lawrence P. Neal's** marker was unveiled at 12 Jumel Terrace where he and his wife Evelyn and son Avatar lived. Neal was a scholar, professor, poet, critic, and playwright. A visionary, he was one of the engineers of the Black Arts Movement, which emerged in the 1960s. He worked closely with Amiri Baraka, founder of the Black Arts Repertory Theater in Harlem, to reestablish an arts practice that not only reflected the issues, challenges, and victories within the Black community, but also married politics and aesthetics in a responsible and restorative way. The goal was to create poetry, novels, visual arts, and theater to reflect pride in Black history and culture and to affirm that art was a means to awaken Black consciousness and achieve liberation. His widow and son, who still live in the family home offered remarks. His son fondly recalled the tap, tap, tap of the typewriter as his father created words of art. Sam Anderson, founder of the Coalition for Public Education and National Black Education Agenda attributed his early successes as a writer to Neal's mentorship.

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The day was accentuated by a performance at the Morris-Jumel Mansion at 65 Jumel Terrace. Larry Neal's works were performed by actors Eon Grey, Keith Edward Johnston, and Bryce Michael Wood, with vocalist Vienna Carroll. J. Rosamond Johnson's arrangements of spirituals were performed by Josh Henderson (violin), Damien Sneed (piano), and singer/songwriter Marcelle Davies-Lashley. As she sang "Lift Evr'y Voice and Sing," the diverse audience stood and sang along with her.

There will be three more markers unveiled in September and November of 2023, and 18 throughout 2024.

The **SIGNS OF THE TIMES: Harlem Heritage Markers Project** is made possible by the generous support of the **African American Cultural Heritage Action Fund** and **New York Life**. While We Are Still Here also receives programmatic support from the **Mellon Foundation**, **New York Community Trust**, **Humanities NY**, **West Harlem Development Corporation**, **West Harlem Development Corporation**, and the **Medical Center Neighborhood Fund**.

Special thanks to the following partners: **New York Public Library**, the **CUNY Spitzer School of Architecture**, and the **Jazz Foundation of America**.

For information on the 2023 dedications, [click here](#).

Click for bio of [Karen D. Taylor](#) and [Brent Leggs](#)

For presenter bios [click here](#).

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**About While We Are Still Here:** A community-based organization founded in 2015 and committed to the safeguarding and celebration of Harlem's history and culture. Its mission is to *educate, enshrine and preserved the extraordinary legacy of Harlem as an influential incubator vital to the intellectual, cultural, social, and political advancements of the Harlem community and the African Diaspora.*

For more information log onto [www.harlemnyc.org](http://www.harlemnyc.org)