



Who We Are

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Harlem Renaissance Librarian: Regina Anderson Andrews

Saturday, May 4, 2024 | 2PM-4PM

Washington Heights Library | 1000 St. Nicholas Avenue



Making Harlem's History Unavoidable

Time has passed since Camille Billops shared her pearl of wisdom, but the truth connects timelessly: It's comforting for the cultures and peoples that seek to be seen in the most truthful way. For While We Are Still Here (WWSH), Camille Billops's quote is our reason for being.

The SIGNS OF THE TIMES: Harlem Heritage Markers Project has been a long time coming, and because this community's history is so vast, the prospect of capturing some of it, for posterity, is intimidating and inspiring. When we met Marline A. Martin, a current member of our advisory board, she was then the executive director of Arts Horizons/ Leroy Neiman Gallery. She said, "We need plaques all around Harlem," and when I mentioned the idea of markers to William Seraile, Ph.D., he sent me a list of more than one hundred people who had lived here at some point.

Bill said, "Harlem lacks an identity. Not an identity of culture, but, rather, an identity of its history: Who did what where? Who lived there?" So WWSH sought to answer those questions through the SIGNS OF THE TIMES. Bill's list, combined with While We Are Still Here's mission, provided the impetus for WWSH to begin a pre-pandemic application process with New York City: After many meetings and revised submissions to various city agencies, we were granted final approval.

*"IT IS IMPORTANT THAT WE
WRITE OUR OWN HISTORIES,
OTHERWISE THEY WILL
SAY WE WERE NEVER HERE."*

**—CAMILLE BILLOPS, ARTIST
AND ARCHIVIST**

The African American Cultural Heritage Action Fund, New York Life, and WWSH

In 2018, in Boston, two board members and I attended a training organized by the African American Cultural Heritage Action Fund (AACHAF). The Fund is the brainchild of its executive director, Brent Leggs. His colleague, Robert Bull, a fundraising-development expert, with many years of experience, facilitated the workshop.

As the weekend came to a close, Brent asked us what we wanted to see in Harlem. We told him "twenty-five markers to start," and due to his commitment to heeding Camille Billops's call to action—because that's what it is—and his vast network of funders that support African American preservation

efforts, we are able to help make Harlem's history unavoidable. Without AACAHF's support, this idea would not have become a reality. New York Life also offered its financial and technical support for SIGNS OF THE TIMES.

The Who, What, Why, When, and Where

In addition to Bill's list, we also learned of sites from other people who have an intimate familiarity with the distinctive history of this community. Most of them live or have lived in Harlem, and they shared vital memories of places that are long gone, but still important.

We held a community forum at the George Bruce library on 125th Street. People came together to share their ideas about who and what should be honored with a marker. The meeting was facilitated by Joyce Dudley of Dudley and Associates.

Researcher, Deborah Cowell, and I compiled people's choices onto

a spreadsheet that included brief narratives on site histories, GPS coordinates, street addresses, and photographs. We used this information to begin the application process with the city. Through this

"HARLEM LACKS AN IDENTITY. NOT AN IDENTITY OF CULTURE, BUT, RATHER, AN IDENTITY OF ITS HISTORY: WHO DID WHAT WHERE? WHO LIVED THERE?"

—WILLIAM SERAILE, PH.D.
HISTORIAN

process, WWSH learned that there are many New York City regulations regarding what can go into the sidewalk and where. For example, if the street is too narrow, no marker can be installed. If there are gas and electric lines adjacent to where you would like the marker, no marker can be installed, and, of course fire hydrants, bus stops, and bus shelters have restrictions. This is why, for example, influential organizations such as Kamoinge and Weusi are

not represented in this iteration of SIGNS OF THE TIMES. The street they occupied was too narrow to accommodate a marker.

The markers say, *we are here and this is what we did*. The markers are a way to magnify the Black journey toward recognition for that which we have contributed, not only to Harlem, not only to New York City, but to the nation and the world. Through SIGNS OF THE TIMES, we seek to leave visual reminders of Harlem as a locus of the heart of the African Diaspora, as the Capital of the Black world. This is where the dynamic creativity, spirituality, politics, and intellectualism came together and created a village, and in this village one could find an array of exotic and mainstream religions, new ways of theorizing about liberation, and artistry tied to freedom dreams.

Regina Anderson Andrews became the first Black supervising branch librarian with the New York Public Library.

She and W.E.B. Du Bois, founded the Krigwa Players, a theater company that operated at the 135th St. Public Library, where Andrews worked: She was also an actor and a playwright—a Renaissance Woman in more ways than one. For over forty years, she created various public programs, including lectures, drama series, and art exhibitions for the communities of Harlem, the Lower East Side, and the Bronx, bringing visibility to the social, political, and cultural lives of African Americans and those from Africa, Latin America, and Southeast Asia.

The flat she shared with Ethel Ray and Louella Tucker, at 580 St. Nicholas Avenue, became a literary salon for writers and artists of the Harlem Renaissance, which included Jean Toomer and Zora Neale Hurston.

In the Spirit of Heritage,

Lauren D. Taylor

Guests at breakfast party for Langston Hughes hosted by Regina Anderson Andrews and Ethel Ray at 580 St. Nicholas Avenue, Harlem, May 1925. Back row, left to right: Ethel Ray Nance, Langston Hughes, Helen Lanning, Pearl Fisher, Rudolf Fisher, Luella Tucker, Clarissa Scott, Hubert Delany. Front row, left to right: Regina Anderson Andrews, Esther Popel, Jessie Fauset, Marie Johnson, and E. Franklin Frazier. Courtesy Schomburg Center



Regina Anderson Andrews

"We have given special attention to the production of original unpublished plays by Negroes. After four years of work with our theater, I feel that our greatest contribution to the cultural achievement of the community will be in this production of original plays..."

—Regina Anderson Andrews

The powerful and lasting impact that Regina Anderson Andrews herself would have on the Harlem community could not have been estimated, either. The petite, soft-spoken librarian arrived in Harlem in 1922 when she was just twenty-one years old, full of innovative ideas and a passion to put them into action. She saw the library as a focal point in the community, providing more than books, but could also be a center for learning, theater, intellectual exchange, the arts, and academic tutoring. Not only did Regina Anderson Andrews become the first African American woman to head a New York City Public Library branch, she also became a respected playwright, international diplomat, and community activist.

This biography continues on our website: harlemnyc.org



Regina Anderson Andrews. Courtesy Schomburg Collection.

Program



2:00-4:00

Regina Anderson Andrews Dedication, 1000 St. Nicholas Ave.

Andrews was the supervising librarian of this branch from 1938-67. Vianela Rivas is the current library manager for the branch, following in Andrews's footsteps.

2:00-2:45

At Unveiling Outdoors

3:00-3:25

At Presentation Indoors, Ethelene Whitmire, author of *Regina Anderson Andrew: Harlem Renaissance Librarian*, via Zoom (3rd floor) Q&A

3:25-4:00

Reception and adult book giveaway (3rd floor) Facilitated children's activity and book giveaway (2nd floor)

Karen D. Taylor While We Are Still Here, founder/
executive director,
Keren Dillard architectural design-researcher and writer,
Heather Nesle New York Life Foundation, president,

Priscilla Bassett New York Public Library,
retiree
Regina Gibson-Broome great-niece of Regina Anderson
Andrews,
Anthony Turner great-nephew of Regina Anderson
Andrews

Presenters

Will Anderson was born in Tokyo, Japan in April 1956 to Maurice Anderson, an American serviceman and Yoko Kuramitsu, a college student. Will lived in Seattle, WA until the end of kindergarten and then his family moved to Upper Manhattan so his father could go to grad school at Columbia University. During the move East, Will stayed with his great aunt Regina Andrews and her husband William Andrews for a couple weeks prior to moving to NYC.



Today he is the owner of a computer consulting practice in Westchester County, NY. He has two daughters and three grandsons. Will's longtime girlfriend is Jayne Morin and they share a love of English Springer Spaniels.

Priscilla Bassett, a librarian and life-long advocate for equity and social justice, was the children's librarian of the Washington Heights branch in the 1980s. During her first stint with the New York Public Library in 1951, she interned in the same branch and worked under Mrs. Regina Anderson Andrews, then chief librarian for Northern Manhattan. Priscilla saw firsthand Mrs. Andrews's devotion to community participation in the library, including "Africa Nights," presented with the United Nations. Priscilla and her family lived in a brownstone around the corner on West 162nd Street beginning in 1971. She and her late husband, Emmett, were active in the community and served on the New York Presbyterian Community Health Council and their block association. Since moving to Sullivan County, New York, Priscilla has continued her life of activism as an advocate for universal health care and senior issues.



Keren Dillard is an architectural design-researcher and writer from Yonkers, New York who works within the intersections of architecture and journalism. She has written for Azure Magazine, Architectural Digest's Clever, and is a regular contributor to web and print at The Architects Newspaper, Dezeen, and Dwell. Her work seeks to challenge socio-political issues through design criticism and draw attention to the marginalized voices in design.



Keren's current research explores traces of inequitable urban planning practices through the comparative analysis of racialized urban zones and other ghetto conditions against histories of Black slavery in the Americas in order to contextualize the historical echoes of plantation practices in the post-antebellum world.

Regina Gibson-Broome is the great niece of Regina Anderson Andrews. She lives in North Hollywood, California.



At seventy years young, she recently wrapped a thirty-year career in the television and film industry. Though Regina never met her Great Aunt Regina, face to face, she along with her mom, Lorelei, spent many hours on the phone as her great aunt shared the family history and stories. Aunt Regina gifted her great niece her treasure trove of family photos, many of which are included in Ethelene Whitmire's great biography. Now retired, niece Regina is enjoying time with family and friends and traveling as much as possible. She considers it a great honor and blessing to be the namesake of such an amazing pioneer, trailblazer, and visionary. For additional information, please contact Regina at rgbroome@sbcglobal.net

Heather Nesle is president of the New York Life Foundation, the charitable foundation created by New York Life Insurance Company. In addition to her Foundation duties, she is senior vice president of New York Life's Corporate Responsibility Department. The New York Life Foundation devotes the majority of its funding each year to educational enhancement in middle school, childhood bereavement, and social justice. Since its founding in 1979, the Foundation has made nearly \$415 million in contributions to US-based, non-profit organizations. Ms. Nesle serves on the board of directors of the Afterschool Alliance, Philanthropy New York, and Monumental Women. She currently resides in Manhattan with her husband, Steve; son, Benjamin; and daughter, Paige.



Anthony Turner, the great nephew of Regina Anderson Andrews lives in Houston, Texas with his wife Tunisia, and is the proprietor of a visual content creation firm. Prior to moving to Texas, Anthony practiced law for twenty-three years in California, following the footsteps of his great-grandfather, William “Habeas-Corpus” Anderson. Anthony is a licensed commercial drone pilot, adding an aerial perspective to his creative endeavors. With a strong belief in community engagement, he serves as a volunteer firefighter, a member of the US Coast Guard Auxiliary, and was recently elected as a board member of a Municipal Utility District. In his personal life, Anthony takes pride in his three adult children and two granddaughters, all residing in California. As the great nephew of Regina Anderson Andrews, he draws inspiration from a rich heritage of achievement and advocacy.



Ethelene Whitmire is the chair of the Department of African American Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. She received an American-Scandinavian Foundation fellowship and a Lois Roth Endowment grant to support her publication in progress, *Searching for Utopia: African Americans in 20th Century Denmark*. She was also a 2016-17 Fulbright Scholar and visiting professor at the University of Copenhagen’s Center for Transnational American Studies. She is the author of *Regina Anderson Andrews: Harlem Renaissance Librarian*. Professor Whitmire received a Ph.D. from University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, and an MLS and a BA from Rutgers.



Save the Date
Sunday, June 30, 2024

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HARLEM
SIGN
OF THE
TIME

MISSION ST

While We Are Still
will educate, enshrine
the extraordinary legacy
as an influential incubator
vital to the intellectual
social, and political ac
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AFRICAN AMERICAN
CULTURAL HERITAGE
ACTION FUND
**WHILE WE
ARE STILL HERE**
NEW YORK LIFE

J. ROSAMOND JOHNSON

437 W. 162ND ST

A PROLIFIC COMPOSER KNOWN FOR
"LIFT EV'RY VOICE AND SING,"
HE CHAMPIONED BLACK MUSIC
IN THE US
AND EUROPE.



SIGNS OF THE TIMES: **Harlem Markers Celebration**

Apollo Theater Sound Stage

To celebrate the historic installation of the historic markers that honor individuals, organizations, and events that imbue Harlem with its unique history, While We Are Still Here is presenting an afternoon of speakers and performances.

The price of the ticket includes a complimentary buffet.

Save the Date September 8, 2024

Featuring performances by

Allan Harris, Steven Oquendo Latin Jazz
Orchestra, Burnt Sugar, Jen Jade Ledesna,
Marcus Persiani and the Uptown Hi-Tones

Sugar Hill Luminaries Lawn
Edgecombe Avenue and 155th Street
Harlem, NY

*8th
Annual*



The Community It Took

ADVISORS

Patricia Allen
Sam Anderson
Playthell Benjamin
Alexa Birdsong
Basir Mchawi
Ademola Olugbefola
In Memoriam, Bob Gumbs

RESEARCH, WRITING AND EDITORIAL

Deborah Cowell, researcher
Yvonne Wakim Dennis, researcher, writer
William Seraile, Ph.D., researcher
Candacy Taylor, writer
Karen D. Taylor, researcher, writer

ARCHITECTURAL DESIGNER

Keren Dillard

PHOTOGRAPHY

Keren Dillard
Siyaka Taylor-Lewis

MARKER PLACEMENT SURVEYING

Chenzira Taylor-Lewis

REGINA ANDERSON ANDREWS EVENT

Technical

Davtech Productions—Sound

Mover

Rich Burrell

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