

# WHILE WE ARE STILL HERE

PRESERVING HARLEM'S HISTORY



Celebrating 6 Years (2015-2021)  
Harlem, NY

# Boards of Directors, and Advisors

*(Institutions listed for affiliations only)*

## DIRECTORS

**June Watson Benjamin**, United Auto Workers International

**Jenna Bond**, Television Writer

**Deidre B. Flowers**, Ph.D. Independent Scholar

**Stephanie Renee Payne**, Professor, University of Southern California | President

**Vera E. Sims**, Educator, NYC Department of Education

**Paulette J. Tabb**, Educator, NYC Department of Education

**Yvonne Wakim Dennis**, Author; Native American Rights Activist

**Karen D. Taylor**, ex-officio

## ADVISORS

**Alexa Birdsong**, Co-founder, Jazz at Lincoln Center

**Herb Boyd**, Scholar-Historian-In-Residence; Professor, CUNY; Author; Journalist; Activist

**Marie Dutton Brown**, Literary Agent, Marie Brown Associates

**Carmen Cruz**, Independent Curator; Silent Procession for Puerto Rico

**Monica L. Gray**, Conference and Event Planning Director National Urban League; National Minority Suppliers Development

**Professor Jamal Joseph**, Columbia University

**Marline A. Martin**, Independent Arts Consultant; Writer

**Professor Rosemari Mealy**, City University of New York

**Professor Mark Naison**, Fordham University

**Byron C. Saunders**, Independent Consultant

**Professor Emeritus Michael Thelwell**, Co-founder W.E.B. Du Bois Afro-American Studies Department, University of Massachusetts

**Stephen Robinson**, MD, MPH, Private Practitioner

**Cheryl Scott**, MD, MPH, Private Practitioner

**Judith Stafford**, In Memoriam

**Karen D. Taylor**, Founder/Executive Director

# Then, the Pandemic Came. . .

Dear Friends,

Three years into our existence, it was difficult for us to see a clear path for our future, as a fledgling organization devoted to celebrating Harlem's diverse history. There were various reasons. While We Are Still Here (WWSH) was an unknown entity; we had no money; and no staff. At that moment, a wise woman we know, who has had decades of experience in the non-profit realm, encouraged us to stay the course, saying "Start planning your fifth anniversary." Then, the pandemic came. So, in 2021, we are blessed to be here to present this celebratory event, the first of several that will take place through June 2022.

This is the fifth year that WWSH has featured performers who are, somehow, connected to Harlem. Burnt Sugar is a case in point: The man who founded the band, Greg Tate, is a long-time resident. Charenee Wade has enriched the world with her take on Gil Scott-Heron and Brian Jackson's music (and literature). The Sugar Hill Quartet, the longest-running house band in Harlem, has played every year of the festival. They, and their special guest, James Carter, spent untold hours on St. Nicholas Avenue and 149th Street, at St. Nick's Pub. Duane Eubanks spent a few hours on that bandstand as well. Reading

Across Harlem is now in its fourth year, and WWSH is honored that Abiodun Oyewole, of the Last Poets (and of himself) will be discussing his poetry and life, with scholar Hank Williams of Lehman College.

Harlem, known as the Capital of the Black World, is the loadstar that drew Black folk, from the South, the Caribbean, and beyond, in search of freedom and justice by any means necessary. The historical record is burgeoning with examples, of how Harlem changed the world. From James P. Johnson and those Harlem Stride players, to Hubert Harrison's cries for revolution, to Garvey's U.N.I.A., to Zora and the Harlem Renaissance, to Queen Mother Moore's early arguments for reparations, to the WEUSI Artist Collective, to the growth of the Panthers and the Lords, to Elombe Brath's consistent solidarity with African liberation struggles— in these Harlem streets, there are vast constellations aglow with Black brilliance.

WWSH seeks to make this history unavoidable.

In the Spirit of Heritage,

A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Charenee".

September 25, 2021

# Timeline

## 2015 March

Founded at 555  
Edgecombe Avenue

Hired researcher to  
uncover residents of  
409 and 555

## August-September

"We're Still Here,"  
photo exhibit co-  
sponsor with Leroy  
Neiman Gallery

## October

Community Forum  
I: What Should  
Harlem's History Look  
Like in the Future?  
Tzion Café

## November

Incorporated in New  
York State

## December

"A Push to Preserve  
the Legacy of  
Harlem's Sugar Hill,"  
by David Gonzalez,  
*New York Times*

II: Report Back to the  
Community—What  
Should Harlem's  
History Look Like in  
the Future? Tzion  
Café

## March-April

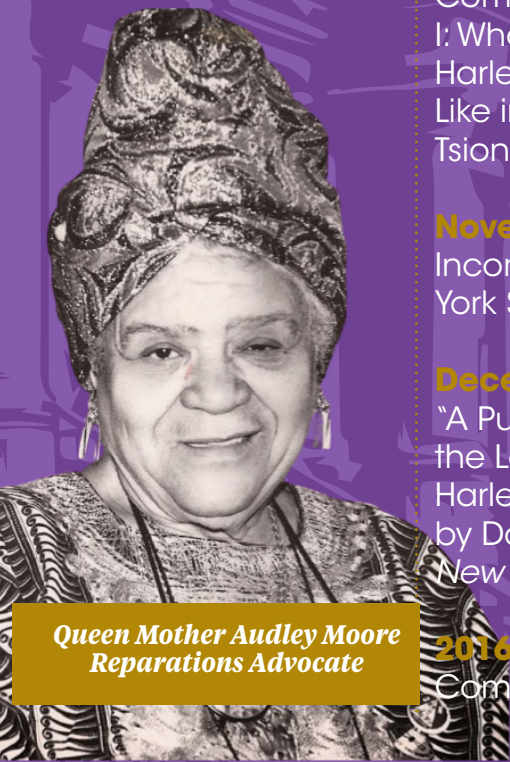
Baldwin's America  
Reading and  
Discussion Group  
with Herb Boyd (4-  
part series)  
Tzion Café,  
Revolution Books

## Spring-Summer

Oral History Tappings:  
June Benjamin,  
Playthell Benjamin,  
Norman Skinner,  
Judy Stafford, Tesfaye  
Tessema, Jane  
Wright

## 2016 February

Community Forum



**Queen Mother Audley Moore**  
*Reparations Advocate*



## July-November

1st Season | When  
Sugar Hill Was  
Sweet: A Centennial  
Celebration of 409  
and 555 Edgecombe  
Avenue

Late pianist, the  
gracious Geri Allen,  
played for WWSH for  
our first Echoes of  
the Eras, which we  
renamed the Sugar  
Hill Music Festival

**The Harrises of  
Harlem: Eight  
Generations—The  
Mildred Harris  
Jackson Collection**  
| A Photography  
and Art Exhibit, Leroy  
Neiman Gallery

"A Young Black Girl's  
View of Harlem  
During the Great



Migration," by Emily  
Raboteau, New Yorker  
Magazine

## December

Granted 501c3 status

## 2017 February

NEW YORKER  
A YOUNG BLACK GIRL'S VIEW OF HARLEM AT  
THE HEIGHT OF THE GREAT MIGRATION  
By Emily Raboteau  
November 23, 2016



1/16

Courtesy The Mildred Harris Jackson Collection

Mildred, Thelma, and Danny with their father's Pontiac, circa 1940

**The Harrises of  
Harlem: Eight  
Generations—The  
Mildred Harris  
Jackson Collection**  
| A Photography  
and Art Exhibit  
Rio 3 Gallery,  
Broadway Housing  
Communities, Sugar  
Hill Building

## Spring-Summer

Oral History Tappings:  
Katherine Butler  
Jones, Vaughn Terry  
Jelks

## July

Oral History Tapings:  
Laverne Gaither;  
Denise, Keith, and  
Taylor Thompson

## September-May

2nd Season | When  
Sugar Hill Was  
Sweet: A Centennial  
Celebration of 409  
and 555 Edgecombe  
Avenue

## 2018 March

Oral History Tapings:  
Tesfaye Tessema,  
Cassandra Wilson

## April

Premiered *In the  
Face of What We  
Remember: Oral  
Histories of 409 and  
555 Edgecombe  
Avenue* Miller  
Theatre at Columbia  
University, Harlem, NY

## September- November

3rd Season | When  
Sugar Hill Was  
Sweet: A Centennial  
Celebration of 409  
and 555 Edgecombe  
Avenue

## October

*In the Face of What  
We Remember: Oral  
Histories of 409 and  
555 Edgecombe  
Avenue*

Reel Sisters Film  
Festival  
Miller Theatre at  
Columbia University,  
Harlem, NY

## November

Oral History Tapings:  
St. Nick's Pub at  
Bill's Place, with  
Gerald Cyrus, David  
F. Gibson, Patience  
Higgins, Marcus

Persiani, Bill Saxton

## 2019 August

*In the Face of What  
We Remember: Oral  
Histories of 409 and  
555 Edgecombe  
Avenue*

Association for the  
Study and Life of Afro  
American History  
(ASLAH)  
104th Annual  
Conference,  
Charleston, SC

## September

Attended Preserva-  
tion Leadership  
Training: Board  
Building and  
Fundraising Intensive  
at African Meeting  
House in Boston,  
MA, sponsored  
by the National  
Trust for Heritage  
Preservation/African



*Untitled*, taken at St. Nick's Pub © Gerald Cyrus

American Heritage  
Cultural Action Fund  
(Karen, Paulette,  
Vera)

*In the Face of What  
We Remember: Oral  
Histories of 409 and  
555 Edgecombe  
Avenue, Baltimore  
International  
Black Film Festival,  
Baltimore, Maryland  
and*

400 Years Of  
Inequality: 1619  
Project *In the Face of  
What We Remember:  
Oral Histories  
of 409 and 555  
Edgecombe Avenue*  
Aaron Davis Hall,  
Harlem, NY  
With invocation by  
Chief Reggie and  
Minister Tulani Kinard

## **September-October** 4th Season

### **2020 March**

Began the process  
of applying to the  
city of New York  
to approve SIGNS  
OF THE TIMES | The  
Harlem Heritage  
Markers Project to  
install twenty-five  
markers, over two  
years

### **2021 The Pandemic Continues July**

*In the Face of What  
We Remember: Oral  
Histories of 409 and  
555 Edgecombe  
Avenue*  
Selected for Harlem  
International Film  
Festival, Harlem, NY

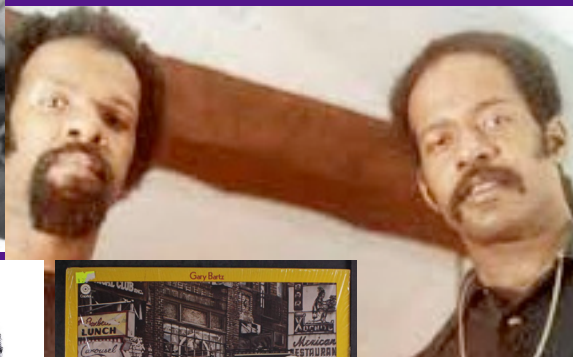
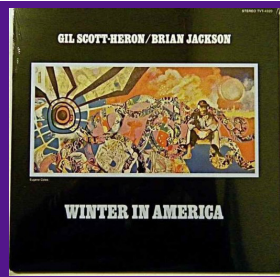
WHILE WE  
ARE STILL HERE  
PRESERVING HARLEM'S HISTORY

wwsh



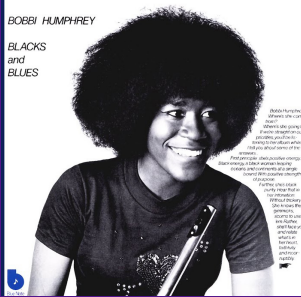
## The Mizell Brothers and Gil Scott-Heron

This year's Sugar Hill Music Festival pays homage to the Mizell Brothers and Gil Scott-Heron. These artists are very much a part of Harlem's history and have contributed to the Harlem tradition of innovation and influence in the realm of Black Music. We found out through Joyce Jones, radio producer/host and the emcee for this year's festival, that the Mizells lived at 555 Edgecombe Avenue when they were children. Brother Gil lived there, too, and there are some residents who remember his presence.



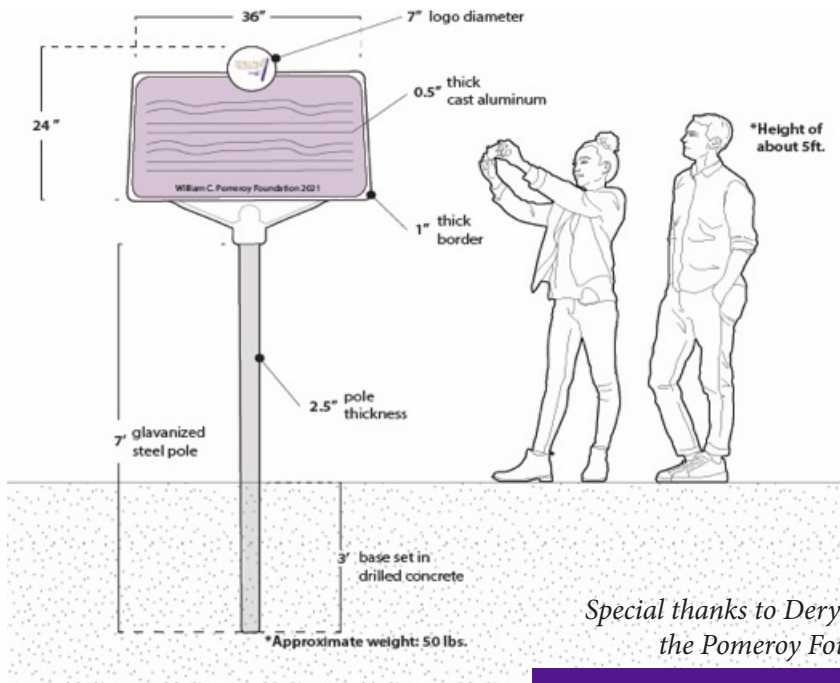
BOBBI HUMPHREY

BLACKS  
and  
BLUES



# HARLEM HERITAGE MARKERS PROJECT SIGNS OF THE TIMES

An initiative that will install twenty-five historic markers in Harlem over two years. Markers include the home of J. Rosamond Johnson, composer of "Lift Ev'ry Voice and Sing," and the funeral site of Malcolm X.



*Special thanks to Deryn Pomeroy and the Pomeroy Foundation*

Elevation prepared for NYC Department of Transportation by Keren Dillard, architect

# Profiles



## **Burnt Sugar the Arkestra Chamber**

"Listening/watching BSAC playing live is an intense, amazing experience. If there existed a place where Sun Ra's Arkestra would meet George Clinton's Funkadelic/Parliament it's there you would find Burnt Sugar the Arkestra Chamber." ~ Pino Saulo/Radio Rai Radio 3

Founded by *Village Voice* icon Greg "Iron-man" Tate and co-led with Dayton, Ohio monster groove bassist Jared Michael Nickerson, Burnt Sugar the Arkestra Chamber is a forum for New York City's improvisational musicians to compose, record, and perform an eclectic range of musical idioms.

Since 1999, BSAC's travels have taken them to Royal Festival Hall, Marquee Club, Brighton Music Festival, *Musique de Nuits, Banlieues Bleues, Sons d'hiver* Festivals, J.F. Kennedy Center, *Sardegna e Jazz Festival*, Hammer Museum, S.F. Jazz Center, *Serralves Em Festa*, Concert of Colors,



Chicago's Museum of Contemporary Art, the Netherlands' Club Paradis, Temple University, University of Penn, the Painted Bride Art Center, Jazz At Dia, Walker Art Center, Guelph Jazz Festival, NJPAC, Real Art Ways, AFRO PUNK, the Brooklyn Museum, the Apollo Theater, Central Park Summerstage, and Lincoln Center.

## Duane Eubanks



Duane studied jazz in master classes at Tem-

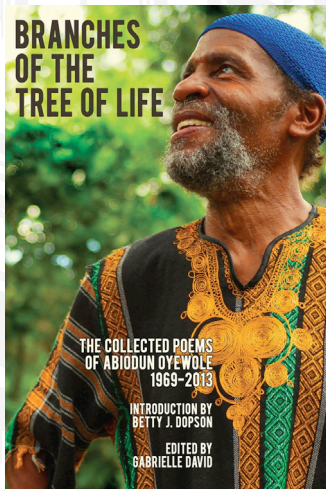
ple University with the legendary Dr. Billy Taylor. He cut to the chase and headed to New York. He was tapped by the great pianist Mulgrew Miller to join his ensemble, Wingspan. Acclaimed double-bassist/bandleader Dave Holland invited Duane to play with his big band on a pair of GRAMMY-award-winning albums. Eubanks became a sought-after horn player. He recorded and played with Elvin Jones, John Hicks, Curtis Fuller, Louis Hayes, Randy Brecker, Avery Sharpe, and Nicholas Payton.

Jazz is his turf. His bloodline. That bloodline began with his mother, pianist Vera

Eubanks. She was the illustrious Kenny Barron's first piano teacher. His brothers are celebrated trombonist Robin Eubanks and guitarist Kevin Eubanks. Legendary pianist Ray Bryant is his uncle. Yet, his jazz bloodline isn't a border, but a gateway where he crossed over to play and record with Alicia Keys, Talib Kweli, Mos Def, Wu-Tang Clan, Freedom Williams, and Kirk Franklin. He has played the Hollywood Bowl, Carnegie Hall, and the Kennedy Center as well as toured throughout Europe, Japan, and the Middle East.

## Abiodun Oyewole

Abiodun is a poet, author, teacher, and



a founding member of the American music and spoken-word group The Last Poets, which laid the groundwork for the emergence of hip-hop. He was born Charles Davis in Cincinnati, Ohio and grew up in Queens, New York. Listening to his parents' jazz and gospel records and studying Langston

Hughes and other great poets in school helped nurture Oyewole's love of poetry.

On May 19, 1968, the anniversary of Malcolm X's birthday, Oyewole, David Nelson and Gylan Kain read poetry in tribute to Malcolm X at a memorial for him, and the Last Poets were born. The group's message, deeply rooted in Black Nationalism, quickly became recognized within the African American community.

Oyewole was forced to leave The Last Poets after being sentenced to four years in a North Carolina prison for larceny. While serving two

and half years of his sentence, he attended a nearby college and earned his bachelor's degree in biology. After he completed his BA in communications at Shaw University, he returned to New York and worked briefly at Columbia University in New York City. He would work at a number of learning institutions and eventually earned an MA in education at Columbia University.

### **Sugar Hill Quartet with Special Guest James Carter**



Harlem. Through various personnel changes, over nearly three decades, SHQ held it down on the bandstand at the Mark IV, St. Nick's Pub, Minton's, the Lenox Lounge, and Smoke (located on the Upper West Side). Today, the Quartet is Patience Higgins, Marcus Persiani, Tarik Shah, David F. Gibson, and special guest James Carter.

### **Charenee Wade**

Charenee is an

award-winning vocalist, arranger, educator, and composer. A recipient of the 2017 Jazz at Lincoln Center Millennial Swing Award and first runner-up in the 2010 Thelonious Vocal Competition, Wade has worked with artists including Wynton Marsalis, Terri Lyne Carrington, Christian McBride, Winard Harper, Eric Reed, Jacky Terrason, Curtis Lundy, Robert Glasper, and Kyle Abraham. In her early years, Wade was select-

ed as one of four artists for the Dianne Reeves Young Artist Workshop at Carnegie Hall, as well as Betty Carter's Jazz Ahead Program, where she was mentored by Carmen Lundy and Curtis Fuller and performed her original music at the John F. Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C. An alumna of what is now the LaGuardia High School of Music and Art and Performing Arts, Wade completed her bachelor's and master's degrees in music performance at the Manhattan School of Music.



## MISSION

---

While We Are Still Here (WWSH) will educate, enshrine and preserve the extraordinary legacy of Harlem as an influential incubator that was vital to the intellectual, cultural, social, and political advancements of the Harlem community as well as the African Diaspora.

## VISION

---

While We Are Still Here ensures that the “post-gentrification” community of Harlem and beyond will honor and find a meaningful connection to the legacy of African American achievement, and its paramount importance to world culture.

## PARTNERS

---

1619 Project  
Apollo Theater  
Barnard College  
Teachers College  
National Museum of African American History and Culture | the Smithsonian  
National Trust for Historic Preservation/African American Cultural Heritage Action Fund  
Schomburg Center for Research In Black Culture

## MEMBERSHIPS

---

Association of African American Museums

## SUPPORT

---

The J. Rosamond Johnson Foundation—special thanks to Melanie Edwards whose commitment and faith allowed this event to take place today

Humanities NY, which was the earliest supporter of While We Are Still Here's work

Leigh Patel/Spencer Foundation

National Trust for Historic Preservation/African American Cultural Heritage Action Fund—all praises due to Brent Leggs, the Father of Black Preservationism

New York Community Trust—gratitude to Salem Tsegaye

Appreciation is also due to the individuals who have supported WWSH, who will be named on our new website, which will be unveiled later this fall

A special shout out is due public relations executive Robin Verges, who offered her expertise because she loves Harlem

# Lift Ev'ry Voice and Sing

*(James Weldon Johnson, J. Rosamond Johnson)*

*Lift every voice and sing  
Till earth and heaven ring  
Ring with the harmonies of  
Liberty  
Let our rejoicing rise  
High as the listening skies  
Let it resound loud as the  
rolling sea  
Sing a song full of the faith  
that the dark past has taught  
us  
Sing a song full of the hope  
that the present has  
brought us  
Facing the rising sun of  
our new day begun  
Let us march on till  
victory is won*

Stony the road we trod  
Bitter the chastening rod  
Felt in the days when hope

unborn had died  
Yet with a steady beat  
Have not our weary feet  
Come to the place for which  
our fathers sighed?  
We have come over a way  
that with tears has been  
watered  
We have come, treading our  
path through the blood of  
the slaughtered  
Out from the gloomy past  
Till now we stand at last  
Where the white gleam of  
our bright star is cast

God of our weary years  
God of our silent tears  
Thou who has brought us  
thus far on the way  
Thou who has by Thy might  
Led us into the light

Keep us forever in the path,  
we pray  
Lest our feet stray from the  
places, our God, where we  
met Thee  
Lest, our hearts drunk with  
the wine of the world, we  
forget Thee  
Shadowed beneath Thy  
hand  
May we forever stand  
True to our God  
True to our native land  
Our native land



SCAN



layout/design:

[www.emdesignsgroup.com](http://www.emdesignsgroup.com) | 404.849.1027



[www.wwsh.nyc](http://www.wwsh.nyc)