Welcome to the HarlemNOW walking tour of the historic 125th St. and will look at various places of historical significance located on 125th St. We suggest that you arrive at your tour via the 125th St. station on the 1 train. You will be walking down the steps at the station. The elevated viaduct which runs from 122nd to 135th Street was designated a landmark in 1981. It is one of the few structures so honored.

125th Street is considered the main street of Harlem. It is also known as Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard. Believe it or not, there are over 600 streets, avenues, and boulevards around the world are named for Dr. Martin Luther King. The American Planning Association named 125th Street one of 10 great streets in America. According to Denny Johnson, Public Affairs Coordinator for the American Planning Association, 125th Street was given this honor because it is a “unique area with lots of character”, it has played a “prominent role in history of black America”, and shown “resilience though ups and downs”.

COTTON CLUB
If you walk towards the river, you can see the Cotton Club on your right at 656 West 125th St. Unfortunately, it’s not the original which occupied a unique cultural place in Harlem during Prohibition. The Club first stood at 142nd Street, then moved to 48th Street, before being reincarnated on 125th St. a few years ago. It was noted for featuring the most notable black entertainers of the era, its pale skinned black tall chorus girls, its exclusively white audience, and its very colorful owners. Lena Horne began her career by performing there, as did Dorothy Dandridge; Duke Ellington’s orchestra was the ‘house band’.

WEST HARLEM PIERS PARK
If you walk further towards the river, you will come across two landmarks both north. Fairway, the food store opened a large store on the River and beyond it the West Harlem Piers Park designed by Barbara Wilks with a sculpture by Nari Ward done as part of the NY City’s Percent for Art Program. The park is built on a reclaimed

Turn back and walk east toward the Station

OUR CHILDREN’S FOUNDATION
On the left is Our Children’s Foundation which is a non-profit organization which serves as an after school educational and recreational facility for the children of Harlem. The design by Marble Fairbanks consists of the complete renovation and addition to a 3 story industrial building. The spaces are organized around a new atrium.

HARLEM HYBRID
If you look towards the right side, you will notice Roosevelt Triangle where Morningside Avenue intersects 125th Street. The sculpture sitting on the triangle was inspired by the site, neighboring buildings and natural rock outcroppings nearby. It was designed by Richard Howard Hunt in 1976 and was restored by the New York City Parks Department in 2008.
APOLLO THEATER
On the next block on the North side of the street is the famous Apollo Theater. The Hertig and Seaman New Burlesque Theater, as it was originally known opened in 1914. It took nearly twenty years for it to open its doors to African-American patrons for the first time on Friday, January 26, 1934. Amateur Night began that year, and one of its first performers was a young Billy Holiday. At the age of 17, Ella Fitzgerald made her singing debut here. The Apollo launched other famous careers, including that of Ella Fitzgerald, James Brown, Diana Ross & The Supremes, Gladys Knight & The Pips, The Jackson 5, Patti LaBelle, Marvin Gaye, Luther Vandross, Stevie Wonder, Aretha Franklin, Ben E. King, Mariah Carey, The Isley Brothers, Lauryn Hill, and Sarah Vaughan.

VICTORIA THEATER
A few doors east of the Apollo Theater stands another grand vaudeville house, the former Loew's Victoria Theater. Designed in 1917 by Thomas W. Lamb, it had nearly 2394 seats and an organ costing almost $250,000 to build at the time. In 1987 it was converted into a multi-screen movie complex before being shuttered in 1989. There have been several proposals for redevelopment for the building, most notably in 2005.

FRANCO THE GREAT
If you happen to be in Harlem on a Sunday morning, you will find one of Harlem’s cultural icons, Frank Gaskin also known as ‘Franco the Great’ standing in front of American Apparel. Franco has been called the ‘Picasso of Harlem’. In the 60’s when every store in Harlem was firmly shuttered upon closing, Franco took it upon himself to beautify the community by painting murals on the closed shutters at night. Not all of the murals remain, but many are still intact.

BLUMSTEINS
Across the street is the site of the former Blumstein’s Department Store at 230 West 125th St. Designed by Architects Charles Kohn and Charles Butler in 1923, it was a stylistic amalgam of late Art Nouveau and Early Art Deco. In its day, it was one of the most elegant department stores uptown. In 1958, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was stabbed there while signing copies of his new book, ‘Stride Toward Freedom’. He was taken to Harlem Hospital for surgery. Years before, in 1934, Reverend Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. led an eight week “Don’t Buy Where You Can’t Work campaign in protest of racially segregated hiring practices. On July 26, Blumstein’s promised to hire 35 African-American women as a result. On that day, 1,500 people marked in a victory parade, despite a heavy rain.

As you walk east from the Loew’s Victoria Theater, take note of the Seventh Avenue and 125th Street intersection. It was here that Malcolm X gave many speeches.

HOTEL THERESA
On Seventh Avenue, between 125th Street and 124th Street stands the Hotel Theresa, designed by George and Edward Blum in 1913. Once Harlem’s most prestigious hotel, the “Waldorf of Harlem,” has hosted celebrities and world dignitaries including Fidel Castro. It also contained the offices of A Phillip Randolph’s March on Washington Movement and Malcolm X’s Organization of Afro-American Unity. Now an office building, rechristened the Teresa Towers, the Hotel Theresa was designated a city landmark in 1993.

ADAM CLAYTON POWELL
Across the street is the Harlem State Office Building. This is where President Clinton has his office and also where the Clinton Foundation is housed. In front is a memorial to Adam Clayton Powell sculpted by Branly Cadet in 2005.

STUDIO MUSEUM
Continue walking east on 125th Street. W.E.B. DuBois, the distinguished scholar, teacher and writer, had an office on this block at 139 West 125th Street. Across the Street is the Studio Museum. The Museum features the work of African-American artists and the work that has inspired and influenced black culture. It offers a wide range of public programs as well as an artist-in-residence program. Architecturally, the museum was renovated several years ago by Rogers Marvel Architects which was one of the first cultural works they did in New York City.
LENOX LOUNGE
On Lenox Ave, between 125th St and 124th St, is the legendary Lenox Lounge. Among the many notable performers to play there were: Billie Halliday, John Coltrane, Miles Davis. James Baldwin, Langston Hughes, and Malcolm X were often found among the patrons. The Lounge was restored in 1999, 60 years after it opened.

HIP HOP CULTURAL CENTER
Located in the Magic Johnson Theater Complex at Frederick Douglas Boulevard on the second floor is the Hip Hop History and Cultural exhibition, a living history of hip hop music.

DWYER CULTURAL CENTER
At 258 St Nicholas, is the newest addition to Harlem’s cultural scene, the Dwyer Cultural Center. This facility which opened in June, is the City’s first cultural center dedicated exclusively to the culture, traditions, and history of Harlem.

NATIONAL BLACK THEATER
On the corner of 125th St and 5th Avenue is the National Black Theater. Founded in 1968 as a non-profit organization and center for research and development known as the National Black Theatre Workshop, it now promotes African Americans in the arts. It also houses a large collection of art.

MOUNT MORRIS PARK HISTORIC DISTRICT
One block south on 124th Street is the start of the Mt Morris Park Historic District, one of the city’s premier collections of historic townhouses fronting on Marcus Garvey Park.

HARLEM ENCORE
If you look eastward, you will notice the MetroNorth trains passing overhead. Adorning the overpass is a sculpture part of the New York City Arts for Transit Program, Harlem Encore by Terry Adkins in 1999. This is a large scale installation of panels set against a vibrant blue background incorporating New York City skyscraper imagery.

CRACK IS WACK
Continue eastward toward the Triborough Bridge. On 127th Street in a park by the River is Keith Haring’s Crack is Wack. Originally painted by Keith Haring in 1986, the mural was restored in 2007. It was inspired by Haring’s horror at the ravages of the crack epidemic in the neighborhood in the 80’s. Crack is Wack is supposed to be a warning message about the dangers of drug and drug addition.