



## Smithsonian Institution

*National Museum of African American History and Culture*

### Delegate Magazine 1986

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## HARLEM

### "MEL'S HARLEM"...

EVER SINCE the first Harlemiter moved up from San Juan Hill in 1907 to reside at 2 West 136th Street, which is the present site of Public School 197, Harlem has been the conscience of the City of New York.

There are more than 750,000 Negroes of American and Caribbean descent, as well as 500,000 persons of Puerto Rican and Spanish origin residing in the Harlem community.

With such a mixture of different cultures, different levels of education, different economic status, different customs and patterns of behaviors and living, different religious beliefs, there are bound to be various problems. But in spite of problems and differences, the people of Harlem contribute daily to making the Borough of Manhattan and the City of New York truly a better place in which to live.

The people of Harlem are Democrats - because under organizational Democratic leadership, Harlem has pulled itself up by its boot straps to enjoy the greatest era of prosperity the community has ever known. (Nineteen fifty-four)

In the Harlem of my youth Sports and Vaudeville were the bridges between the whites and the Blacks. There were no MBA's or Negroes in the Corporate world. Negro professionals worked as red caps at Grand Central and Pennsylvania station or as waiters and stewards or bus boys and maids in the private clubs, fraternity houses and hotels.

The Harlem of the thirties was a place where life existed because the Negro mother was a domestic and day worker in the Bronx, or on the upper West side - and Dad was a butler on the East side or a laborer on the docks.

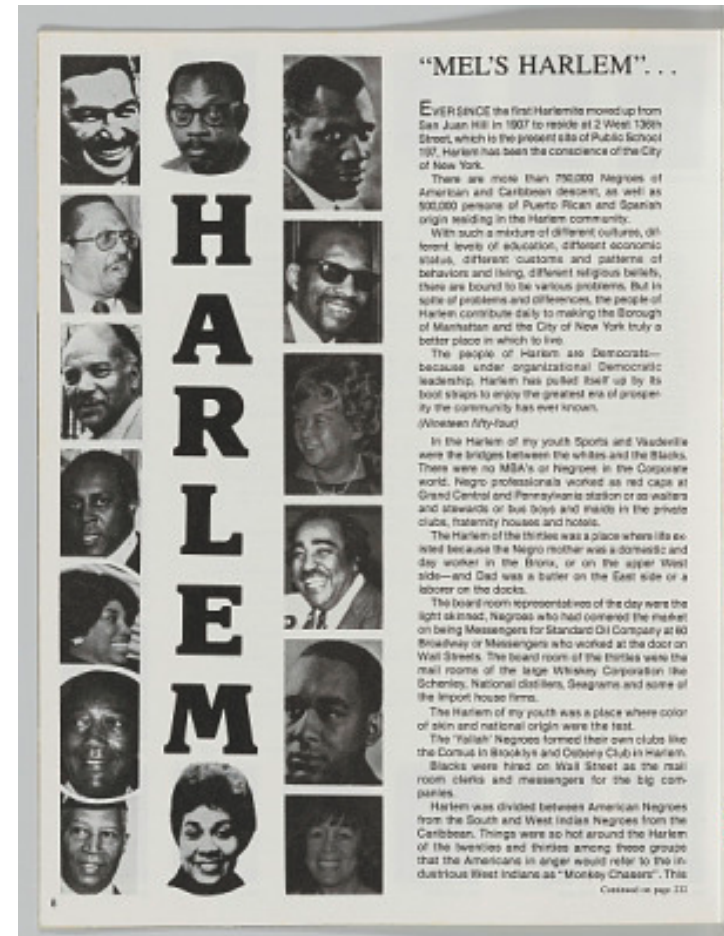
The board room representatives of the day were the light skinned, Negroes who had cornered the market on being Messengers for Standard Oil Company at 60 Broadway or Messengers who worked at the door on Wall Streets. The board room of the thirties were the mail rooms of the large Whiskey Corporation like Schenley, National distillers, Seagrams and some of the Import house firms.

The Harlem of my youth was a place where color of skin and national origin were the test.

The 'Yallah' Negroes formed their own clubs like the Comus in Brooklyn and Osbeny Club in Harlem.

Blacks were hired on Wall Street as the mail room clerks and messengers for the big companies.

Harlem was divided between American Negroes from the South and West Indian Negroes from the Caribbean. Things were so hot around



the Harlem of the twenties and thirties among these groups that the Americans in anger would refer to the industrious West Indians as "Monkey Chasers". This

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