

Constrained But Not Contained: Patterns of Everyday Life and the Limits of Segregation in 1920s Harlem.

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In 1966, in the first major historical study of twentieth-century Harlem, Gilbert Osofsky told the story of the neighborhood in the 1920s as the making of a ghetto. What he described was the emergence of a large, segregated community, and the transformation of the area it occupied into a slum from which black residents could not escape.¹ The demographic evidence of segregated housing is clear. In an expanding area that by 1930 had reached the Harlem river, 155th Street and Central Park West and begun to spill over 125th Street toward Central Park, the residents were almost exclusively African American migrants and West Indian immigrants. However, the black settlement in Harlem was not enclosed in the way that it was in Chicago. Efforts by whites to enforce boundaries quickly failed, the result, Kevin McGruder recently argued, of the diversity of white residents and their relatively short residence in Harlem.² Nor was Harlem characterized by the old, dilapidated housing found in other northern black neighborhoods that drove residents who could afford to look to the suburbs.³ Relatively few black businesses and more limited black property ownership also distinguished Harlem from other black neighborhoods.⁴ Yet evidence of residential segregation, however it spread and whatever its character, offers at best only a partial picture of the nature of the neighborhood. To

determine if a neighborhood is a place apart also requires evidence of where residents went when they left their homes and who spent time in the neighborhood.

Evidence of lived experience in black neighborhoods is fragmentary, and so historians have not used everyday life as an organizing framework for understanding the character of such places. Instead, recent studies have explored specific threads of experience previously marginalized by studies focused on black organizations, writers, and intellectuals: nightlife, numbers gambling, sexual commerce, religion, sports, and consumption.⁵ This project weaves these threads together with additional dimensions to reveal the patterns of everyday life across the week and the year. In doing so it places an emphasis on exactly where residents spent their daily lives that is only fitfully present in those studies. New digital mapping tools offer a means of combining fragmentary evidence and visualizing the spatial dimensions of everyday life to create maps comparable to those based on population censuses that are central to perceptions of Harlem as a segregated neighborhood. With a team at the University of Sydney, I created *Digital Harlem*, an online map-based visualization of both events and places in Harlem that we identified in a variety of sources: the case files of the Manhattan district attorney; the two major newspapers published in Harlem, the *New York Age* and the *New York Amsterdam News*; probation files; prison records; undercover investigations; social surveys; and material collected by the Federal Writers Project for the 1939 New York City Guide.⁶ Our maps of those sources show that 1920s Harlem was not only a racially variegated place, in which whites as well as blacks were present, but also a place in

which the rhythms of everyday life carried residents into white spaces within and beyond the neighborhood.

During waking hours, many adult residents of Harlem were absent from the neighborhood at work. While the limited employment options of black New Yorkers are well known, how the location of that work shaped life in the neighborhood has not been explored. White business owners and staff, and whites working in Harlem's schools, hospitals, buses, streetcars, subways, and the police and fire departments were a presence in Harlem both when its workers were absent, and in many cases after they returned.

While clashes between residents and white police have attracted the attention of scholars, the myriad other interactions and clashes with whites that formed an unavoidable part of daily life have only begun to be explored, in important new work on black consumption by Shannon King.⁷ But missing from that account are interracial interactions at sporting events, such as those discussed in Chicago by Davarian Baldwin, and involving children, which are features of daily life before and after the increased white presence in nightlife in the 1920s that King claims as a turning point.⁸ Also missing are residents' experiences in non-commercial forms of leisure offered by churches, fraternal organizations, community organizations, and social clubs; and at places like beaches and summer camps. This wider fabric of activities is a key context for understanding the place of commercialized leisure in life in Harlem. Adults also ventured beyond the neighborhood's border for leisure as well as work, going even further afield in the summer. Even as Harlem became a neighborhood of segregated housing, then, it did not become an area from which whites and white authority were absent to a sufficient extent

to justify King's claim that "all of Harlem...belonged to blacks."⁹ Nor was the everyday life of its residents contained within Harlem, with many working and playing beyond its boundaries.

Out to Work

As a *New York Times* journalist noted in 1935, "Harlem, in a manner of speaking, is a residential rather than a commercial or industrial city, self-maintained in its social aspects but reaching out into every section of New York in its economic life. Ninety-five percent of Harlem's working population travels to its job. Every morning sees an exodus of workers filling subways, surface cars and elevated trains and every evening sees them returning to their homes."¹⁰ White control of the neighborhood's businesses, and their exclusion of black men and women from most trades and professions, contributed to those journeys beyond Harlem. In 1916 the *New York Age* found that whites owned 75 percent of the 503 businesses in the area where blacks lived. That proportion remained the same in 1921, even as the area of black settlement spread. By 1929, another survey reported even greater white control: 81.51 percent of the 10,319 businesses in black Harlem were in the hands of whites. Few of those businesses employed black staff in their stores, and the deliverymen, insurance salesmen, and rent and bill collectors they sent into the neighborhood were likewise rarely black.¹¹

Unlike their counterparts in other northern cities, Harlem's residents did not find work in New York City's major industries, kept out by white employers and unions. As a result,

two-thirds of Harlem's male workers were employed in manual labor, as longshoremen, janitors, elevator and switchboard operators, porters, day laborers, and waiters.¹² Very few jobs in those fields could be found in Harlem. Morgan Thompson, a married West Indian father of two who turned forty years of age in 1929, worked as a construction laborer. Between 1928 and 1933, he found employment on fifteen different construction sites, in downtown Manhattan and on the Upper East Side, and in the outer boroughs of Brooklyn, Queens and the Bronx. Only once did he work in Harlem, on the new YMCA on 135th Street. Perry Brown, a married man aged in his forties who came to Harlem from Pennsylvania found better paying work than Thompson, as an elevator operator and building superintendent, all in buildings in downtown Manhattan, at the opposite end of the island from Harlem.¹³

Harlem's women had even fewer employment options than men. Almost three-quarters worked in domestic and personal service, as laundresses, hairdressers, domestic day workers (general housework and laundry), and maids. A small number did secure some factory work, a field not open to black men.¹⁴ Domestic work generally took women to different parts of the city than those to which men traveled for laboring jobs. Annie Dillard, for example, an eighteen year West Indian, first found work as a servant on the Upper West Side, on West 102nd Street. In private homes, domestic servants usually performed a multitude of tasks, such as laundry, ironing, cooking, cleaning and serving. The hours were long, the status low, and the supervision tight. Later, Dillard switched to work as a chambermaid in the McAlpin Hotel in midtown and in a boarding house on West 75th Street. Both jobs offered shorter hours than work in private homes: 9 a.m. to

4.30 p.m. at the hotel and part-time at the boardinghouse. She also worked at Park West Hospital on West 76th Street, probably cleaning. In addition, she had a job in a laundry on Cherry Street in Lower Manhattan. A commercial steam laundry was mechanized and organized like a factory, and a job there is best thought of as industrial work. Only that last position took her into a neighborhood where Harlem's men were likely to find employment.¹⁵

Limited work could be found in Harlem. Roger Walker, a nineteen-year-old native of North Carolina, worked as a kitchen hand, counterman, or soda dispenser in restaurants and drug stores in a variety of different locations the length of Lenox and Seventh Avenues. He often worked 12 or 13 hours a day in these positions, and even overtime beyond those hours; in other cases he worked the night shift. That employment offered little stability. Walker changed jobs repeatedly, holding nine different positions in a four-year span. He lost some of those positions due to cutbacks, but more often he quit or was fired as a result of disputes about unpaid or inadequate wages and taking days off.¹⁶ Women could find laundry work in Harlem, which was home to at least fifteen laundries like those that operated in downtown Manhattan. With a little capital, and an apartment, women could open a beauty parlor. At least 200 beauty parlors operated in Harlem, making the beauty industry the neighborhood's largest legitimate black enterprise.¹⁷ Operating a day nursery in their homes required even less capital, especially if a woman did not seek a license.¹⁸ Both occupations had the advantage of not involving work under the gaze of whites, as domestic service did.

Growing up in Harlem

While most employed adults travelled outside Harlem to work six days a week, children remained in the neighborhood. An Urban League study of 2400 families published in 1927 found that more than half of the mothers were in paid employment. Those women reported a variety of means of providing care for the youngest of their children. Most commonly, they were put them in the care of relatives or friends, or the father. A much smaller proportion relied on paid childcare, in private homes or less often in day nurseries.¹⁹ Harlem had only six day nurseries in the 1920s, run by community and church groups, providing places for approximately 200 children a day.²⁰ The more extensive home-based nurseries varied widely in quality. *Amsterdam News* columnist Edgar Grey investigated 123 nurseries that advertised in local newspapers during a five-month period in 1927. Finding only nineteen of the operators had the permits required by New York law, and that most were located in unsanitary situations, he labeled them “baby farms.”²¹ Grey’s polemic likely exaggerated the state of the homes he saw, but day nurseries that advertised in the *Amsterdam News* were clustered in areas of tenement housing, rather than the more upscale and respectable districts that housed much of the beauty trade.²²

Older children spent from 8.30am to 3.00pm in one of Harlem’s schools, white controlled spaces in contrast to black controlled day care. Six public elementary served Harlem’s black community in the 1920s, together with three Catholic elementary schools, and two new public junior high schools built in the 1924 and 1925. Although the numbers of

white pupils in those schools quickly dwindled as black settlement spread, the teachers remained overwhelmingly white.²³ Nonetheless, the black press, which was certainly on the lookout for racial conflict, reported none within the schools. Controversy did flare in 1926 over claims that the principal of the girls' junior high school, was steering her pupils toward vocational programs rather than college preparatory courses.²⁴ An incident at an elementary school two years later in which a white teacher threatened to flog a black boy like they did in the South was reported as the first instance of children being molested by white teachers since that incident.²⁵ To continue on to high school required navigating discriminatory admission processes that limited access and steered students to vocational training, and then, except for the boys attending the industrial school on West 138th Street, travelling beyond black Harlem to schools with overwhelmingly white student bodies. Few Harlem students made that journey.²⁶

After school hours, with their parents still at work, Harlem's school age children were largely left to find their own place in the neighborhood. The 1927 Urban League survey reported that some parents told their children to remain around their school, and a slightly smaller group sent their children to the public library branch on 135th street. By far the largest group of parents reported that their children were able to take care of themselves, or were in the streets.²⁷ By 1930, with somewhere around 20,000 school age children in Harlem, descriptions of them as swarming the street after school hours hardly seems an exaggeration.²⁸ Some children spent time on the major avenues: there they swung on moving trolley cars, auto trucks and other fast running vehicles. More often children occupied residential side streets, for games of baseball, basketball and punchball. The

“reckless way in which youngsters dart about in playing” made it difficult for automobiles to negotiate those streets, and accidents frequently resulted.²⁹ In the mid-1920s, an average of two children a day suffered injuries in automobile accidents between 130th and 155th Streets. Those accidents often led to clashes between drivers and neighborhood residents; in Harlem, such conflicts had an added racial dimension, as most of those driving its streets were white.³⁰

Harlem’s leaders lobbied white-controlled city agencies for traffic police posts and traffic lights to mitigate the danger posed by traffic on the avenues, and for playgrounds to keep children off the streets. It took until 1923 for the Parks Department to open the first playground in Harlem, long after facilities had appeared throughout the city. The Board of Education provided additional playgrounds as part of the two new junior high schools and a public baths, and leased land for an additional playground in 1928. In 1930, the Children’s Aid Society purchased ten lots for a playground in the block between West 133rd and West 134th and Lenox and Fifth Avenues, demolishing most of the buildings, and adding two additional lots with funds provided by Rockefeller. All these playgrounds employed supervisors, a mix of white and black adults who directed what black children could do in those spaces.³¹ For all the crowds that filled the playgrounds, the space to play off the street never amounted to enough to remove more than a small proportion of the growing population of children from the streets.

A Weeknight out in Harlem

When men and women returned to Harlem from work in the evenings, a variety of different tasks and activities sent them through the neighborhood. Residents used the evening to shop and seek services. In the spring of 1920, Mrs. Jennie Taylor was among the witnesses to a shooting on Fifth Avenue near 137th Street just before eleven o'clock at night. She had left her home at half past nine to shop at Solomon's, the butcher, and, having stopped several times to speak to friends and family, was still on her errand when the shooting took place. As well as butchers, businesses ranging from beauty salons and barbers to music shops and dentists remained open until as late as midnight. At 11 p.m., the shops of Seventh Avenue "were still open, brightly lighted and doing a rushing business. The streets were full of people. Seventh Avenue had all the aspects of a lively Saturday afternoon."³²

Shopping drew residents into interactions with whites. Although some white businessmen "were shrewd enough to hold prejudice in restraint for the sake of trade," as columnist Kelly Miller put it, ordinary transactions could erupt into conflicts that drew in other blacks.³³ The screams of a black customer, for example, attracted an angry crowd of several hundred to a hat-cleaning and shoe-shining establishment on Lenox Avenue in July 1930. The customer had been arguing with the white proprietor, Philip Nasselbaum, over ribbon missing from a hat that she had had him clean, when he allegedly struck her. With the crowd besieging the shop, a police officer on the scene had to summon a squad in order to arrest Nasselbaum and protect his store.³⁴ Poor service, a lack of respect, cheating, and racist jibes all provoked black customers into similar angry challenges to white control of Harlem's retail spaces. However, in most cases, residents did not

respond to objectionable behavior with confrontations. The *New York Age* lamented that instead most customers “meekly accepted” their treatment. Characteristically more biting in its judgment, the *Interstate Tattler* noted that aside from the occasional West Indian woman or housewife fresh from the South, “the rest of us seem to glory in being victimized,” believing that “to insist on getting what they ask for or to protest against short weight would not be ladylike.”³⁵ More was at work in continued patronage of white businesses than a lack of fortitude or a concern with respectability. Some residents actually preferred them, choosing not to spend their money in stores run by members of their own race, and refusing to make payments to black collectors, to be served by black waiters or taxi drivers, or to be examined by black physicians. In explaining their behavior, those residents claimed white businesses carried more stock, provided better service and charged lower prices, and that white professionals had greater skill. And in many cases, thanks to the refusal of whites to provide blacks with capital and access to training, they were correct.³⁶

Residents also sought leisure on weekday evenings. Mostly they did so within the boundaries of black Harlem, which offered an extensive range of commercial and non-commercial activities, some of which were shared with whites. As happened in communities across the nation in the 1920s, many black residents of Harlem headed to the movies. Waiter Roger Walker attended four or five movie screenings a week through the 1920s and 1930s, even as he struggled to pay rent. A weekly visit to the movies with his wife was the one form of leisure that former building superintendent Perry Brown held on to as his economic situation deteriorated in the 1930s.³⁷ Five theaters could be

found within black Harlem, open daily from 2 pm to 11 pm. They all screened second and third run features, with supporting bills of comedies and novelties. You could also watch movies at the Lincoln and Lafayette theaters, which had presented live shows until the early 1920s, when small crowds led them to become combination movie theaters and vaudeville houses. The signature of the Lafayette became its midnight revue on Friday nights, which ran until around 4am, and drew white as well as black patrons. To see first run movie features, residents of Harlem had to go to one of the half dozen large cinemas on 125th Street. More than just their size and program differentiated those venues. Those in 125th Street still drew largely white patrons. So while theaters in central Harlem had desegregated before the 1920s, when the population of the neighborhood changed, those on 125th Street only did so gradually across the 1920s. In fact, those theaters only began advertising in the black press in 1930.³⁸

A range of other commercialized leisure could be found without leaving Harlem.

Poolrooms could be found along the commercial streets. Larger scale venues with twenty to thirty tables often labeled themselves billiard halls to claim more respectability.³⁹ At least one billiard hall also featured a bowling alley. In 1930, the miniature golf craze reached Harlem, with two courses opening in July.⁴⁰ Harlem's nightclubs, as they became a regular destination for whites, drew few blacks by the second half of the 1920s. From 1926, blacks wanting to dance went instead to the Savoy Ballroom, a public dance hall. For those seeking liquor, speakeasies were ubiquitous in Harlem. They clustered on the avenues, many located within businesses, and attracted a mix of whites and blacks.⁴¹

Those seeking more privacy and to avoid whites went to buffet flats that black residents

operated in their apartments, away from the avenues where other forms of commercialized leisure were concentrated. The location of buffet flats was spread by word of mouth, allowing them to host prostitutes, gambling, and dancing as well as providing liquor.⁴²

Residents did not only spend their weekday evenings in commercial venues. Churches and fraternal lodges also drew residents out of their homes for activities that rarely, if ever, involved whites. All the major churches held Friday evening prayer meetings, and most held at least one night of bible study classes. Four churches advertised a weekly discussion meeting or lyceum; others almost certainly held such events.⁴³ In addition to these activities, church members formed clubs for educational, social and financial purposes, most of which had a weekly meeting. These clubs reflect the concern with the material conditions of their congregants and the lived experiences of those in the surrounding community that Wallace Best has argued characterized many churches' response to the waves of migrants coming from the South.⁴⁴ One study estimated that the large churches each had twenty-five to forty clubs. Salem M.E., with a congregation of more than 3000 members, had over forty groups including boxing, running and basketball clubs, Brotherhood and Sisterhood clubs, Ladies Aid, home and Foreign Missionary, Men's and Women's Usher Boards, Phyllis Wheatley Club, Social Club, Historical, Junior and Senior Sunshine Clubs, a Floral Circle, and a series of groups that were likely social clubs, the Confidential Club, Morning Star, Silver Leaf, Morning Glory, Willing Workers, Pilgrim Program, Gold Leaf.⁴⁵ Members of Harlem's fraternal lodges also had a weekly meeting to attend, as did women in their affiliated temples. Like churches, lodges

also had a web of additional clubs that met on other evenings. Whereas the lodge met in its hall, most of the clubs met in a member's residence.⁴⁶

A full spectrum of these activities could be also found under a single roof in the very heart of Harlem, at the YMCA and YWCA. They hosted speakers, discussions, social clubs, and sporting contests similar to those found in churches and lodges, as well as offering bowling alleys and swimming pools. However, the two organizations had a different character than churches and lodges. The YMCA and YWCA were non-denominational, and part of a white-led organization. Although all the officers of the Harlem branches were black, white speakers and visitors were a more regular presence than in churches or lodges. In addition to providing accommodation, both the YMCA and YWCA also gave a more central place to vocational education.⁴⁷ By 1927, residents could also attend free vocational evening classes in three of Harlem's public schools, P.S. 89, 90, and 136. In the schools, the instructors were more likely to be white than at the YMCA and YWCA. For men, the city's evening classes provided a path to white-collar work; by contrast, they equipped women for industrial work.⁴⁸

Clubs and societies without connections to any institutions also proliferated in Harlem, just as they did across the nation in the 1920s. They differed from institutional groups in being local in character, and often existed for only a short time, no more than two or three years. Black organizations whose sole purpose was social or recreational appear to have outnumbered the women's clubs concerned causes such as orphanages, girls homes, nurseries and hospitals. Social clubs certainly claimed more space in Harlem's two major

black newspapers, thanks to the society columns that both ran as a regular feature. Clubs with names such as Harmony Exclusive Club, Conthex Bridge Club, Aeolian Girls' Club and the Hunter Comets met in members' homes for musical entertainments and refreshments or card games throughout the week, with Mondays and Thursdays the favored evenings. Some clubs existed primarily to organize one or two social events each year, typically an event at one of the dancehalls for hire in Harlem. Those dances often took place on weeknights, when a venue cost less. Although commonly associated with the black elite, social clubs in the 1920s increasingly drew members from the black middle class.⁴⁹ The locations of meetings confirms that shift, revealing members residing the length of Harlem, rather than concentrated in elite sections like Strivers Row and Sugar Hill. So too does the appearance of social clubs among those who made use of meeting spaces at the YWCA and YMCA.

Weekends of Worship and Sport

Saturday evenings offered distinctive forms of leisure that drew racially mixed crowds, with many of Harlem's sporting contests taking place on that night. College fraternities, lodges, YMCAs, YWCAs, churches, Sunday schools, public schools, and military units competed among themselves in athletics, bowling, and especially basketball. These contests largely, but not exclusively, featured men. Several girls' and women's basketball leagues did compete throughout the 1920s. Games took place in the gyms and halls attached to churches, the YMCA and YWCA, and the public schools; in the armory; and in dancehalls. Basketball games between athletic clubs affiliated with Harlem's churches

became popular enough in the early 1920s to require a larger venue than was available in black Harlem, the Manhattan Casino, north of the neighborhood. Seeking to capitalize on that popularity, the white McMahon brothers established a black professional basketball team in 1922, to play at their venue, the Commonwealth Casino to the east of black Harlem. When that team failed to attract sufficient crowds and folded after two years, the New York Renaissance, or Rens, a black-run team that played at the Renaissance Ballroom in the heart of the neighborhood, became Harlem's team, displacing the amateur athletic clubs. Playing white teams, which local amateur teams did not, in a commercial venue more accessible to white fans than the halls of black organizations, helped the Rens attract crowds of whites as well as blacks. They also took to the road to play around the country, competing against both black and white opponents. Harlem's residents could also attend boxing contests at the Commonwealth Casino. Again, it was bouts between black and white fighters that drew large, and interracial, crowds to that white-owned venue. More racial tension seems to have existed in the crowds watching boxing than basketball, with fans trading insults and black fans pelting white referees with peanuts and pieces of hot dog when they felt a black fighter had been cheated of a win. But those outbursts never developed into the fully-fledged conflicts that flared around traffic accidents, policing, or the behavior of white shopkeepers.⁵⁰

On Sundays, churches became a central hub of activity. As a *Pittsburgh Courier* reporter observed, "avenues and cross streets are filled with throngs of worshippers wending their way to their respective churches."⁵¹ Although Harlem's Protestant churches were black controlled and dominated spaces, a small number of whites could be found in the

congregation at Abyssinian Baptist Church, and likely some other churches. The Catholic parishes, by contrast, were led by white priests and retained significant numbers of white members into the 1930s.⁵² A morning service was only one of the day's activities at most churches. All the churches taught Sunday Schools, in the early afternoon at churches like Abyssinian Baptist and St Marks ME, or prior to the morning service at Williams, adding children to the throngs traveling to church.⁵³ Methodist churches like St Marks and Williams also held early evening meetings of the Epworth League, an organization for young adults aged eighteen to thirty-five years. In the late afternoon, a number of churches held a lyceum, or public meeting, usually addressed by a speaker. All Harlem's churches ended the day with a second service, beginning at 7.30pm or 7.45pm.⁵⁴

Sunday afternoon was the time for cricket and baseball. The two sports had shared the same fields in Harlem, but those venues were no longer available by 1920, requiring players and spectators to travel further afield. Cricket was the sport of West Indians, played mostly at Van Cortlandt Park in the Bronx, where by the late 1920s up to six games took place at the same time in front of small crowds. Games against touring teams from the West Indies, and against white teams, were played at venues with larger capacities such as New York Oval on East 145th St and the Harlem River, Innisfail Park and Starlight Park in the Bronx, and Dyckman Oval in Washington Heights, and attracted several thousand spectators.⁵⁵ Such crowds were more typical at baseball games. Harlem had its own black professional baseball team, the Lincoln Giants, controlled by a series of white owners. In the 1920s, watching the Giants required a long journey by subway to 177th Street and then a streetcar trip to get to the Catholic Protectory Oval, at East

Tremont Avenue and Unionport Road in the Bronx. The team also played occasional games at other stadiums in Washington Heights and Upper Manhattan, and in the homes of white major league teams, Ebbets Field in Brooklyn and Yankee Stadium in the Bronx. Thousands of blacks journeyed to watch baseball in the early 1920s, but crowds waned later in the decade as disputes bedeviled the Eastern Colored League in which the Lincoln Giants competed, the team enjoyed limited on-field success, and basketball grew in popularity in Harlem. As with basketball, professional baseball drew white spectators as well as black, around a quarter of the crowd in most estimates. They came particularly for contests between black and white teams, but also for Colored League games. Again, any racial antagonism that existed between fans did not rise to the level of actual clashes.⁵⁶ In the mid-1920s, as baseball drew smaller crowds, the Rens, the neighborhood's professional basketball team, shifted its regular games from Saturday evenings to Sunday evenings. Promoters had hit on the idea of combining games with dances, a formula that made the team viable (and became a template followed by others organizing basketball games).⁵⁷

In addition to heading to church services, club meetings, and sporting events on Sundays, Harlem's residents simply took to the streets. Columnist Edgar Grey described the scene in the *Amsterdam News* in 1927: "On Saturday evenings and all Sundays the streets are filled with the residents of the community, and on every corner may be seen oceans of them milling about each other and drifting into the shops and stores, stopping to converse, blocking the sidewalk traffic, laughing, shouting merrily without worry or awareness of their plight." Some of those taking to the street Grey described as "out on

dress parade.”⁵⁸ This was the stroll, the use of the streets “as performative sites, readily accessible urban stages for prideful or leisurely strolling and creative sartorial display,” and as venues for interacting with friends and strangers.⁵⁹ Such crowds made the daylight hours of Sundays and holidays immediately distinguishable from other days of the week, when children, not adults, filled the streets.

Taking to the streets, moving around Harlem, put black residents into contact with white police, a ubiquitous presence patrolling posts and wandering its streets in plainclothes. Policing that was both “too vigorous and too lax” often made those encounters tense. On one hand, blacks faced arrests without cause and “on suspicion,” and, when in police hands, suffered random beatings, including the officially sanctioned abuse of suspects that in the 1920s acquired its label as “the third degree.” On the other hand, officers turned a blind eye toward vice in Harlem, ignoring speakeasies, numbers gambling, and prostitutes (or at least those who paid to be overlooked, who were mostly white). There were many occasions when residents were so riled by police activity that crowds took direct action against officers, particularly on the neighborhood’s heavily populated arteries, Lenox and Seventh Avenues, and 135th Street.⁶⁰

Residents not only strolled Harlem’s sidewalks on Sundays, they also took to its streets to parade. A handful of parades associated with major events or conventions, such as the return of the 369th Regiment from WW1, the early UNIA conventions, and the Elks convention in 1927, travelled outside the boundaries of black settlement. In doing so, they claimed wider recognition for the activities of blacks, wove black life into the larger

city, and sent a message to white New Yorkers. Only rarely did they address whites as directly as did the parade of the 1922 UNIA convention, which once it crossed into white neighborhoods switched to a different set of banners, bearing slogans such as, “White man rules America, black man shall rule Africa,” “We want a black civilization,” and “God and Negro Shall Triumph.” Most of Harlem’s parades involved the neighborhood’s fraternal organizations, and remained within black Harlem. Lodges marched from their headquarters to local churches to mark their anniversaries, and participated in parades to mark the groundbreaking of major institutional buildings, and holidays such as July 4th. The typical route took them from their lodge building, up and down Seventh and Lenox Avenues, and across 135th Street. Lodges also turned out for parades on the occasion of a member’s funeral, bearing the coffin from the undertakers to the site of the funeral, and then out of Harlem for burial, usually in Woodlawn cemetery in the Bronx. Pallbearers took the lead, followed by the hearse and other vehicles.⁶¹ In parading on the streets rather than strolling on the pavement, blacks displaced whites who drove the buses, trams, and most of the taxis and private cars, that traversed Harlem’s streets. When a few thousand members of the New York UNIA paraded on August 1, 1925, a group larger than the typical parade, but far short of the size of major marches, the *Amsterdam News* reported that, “Traffic along the streets and avenues on which the “faithful” marched was at a standstill for over an hour.”⁶² As this and almost all the parades in Harlem occurred on a Sunday, traffic would have been relatively light, but the disruption would nonetheless have been significant. Lodges typically included their bands in a parade, extending their appropriation of the street by also interjecting themselves into the sounds of the neighborhood. For all the traffic delays and commotion they produced, parades did

not set off clashes between residents and police. Instead, a permit from the city brought officers to accompany a march and facilitate the black takeover of the streets.

Summer breaks

While blacks could be found parading on Harlem's streets and strolling its sidewalks throughout the year, those activities occurred most often in the summer, when the weather reshaped everyday life. Summer moved life in Harlem outside, and pushed residents beyond the boundaries of the neighborhood. Children no longer attended school, but many did spend part of their summer in the school grounds, where the city operated vacation playgrounds. Staffed by city employees, usually public school teachers and who were more often black later in the 1920s, vacation playgrounds offered physical training, baths, music, and special entertainments, as well as excursions around the city.⁶³ Community groups such as Utopia House, the Urban League and the Children's Aid Society offered similar programs in their playgrounds.⁶⁴ Vacation bible schools at the Abyssinian Baptist Church and Salem ME Church offered programs of art, athletics and outings.⁶⁵

Summer camps provided small numbers of children the chance to go beyond Harlem and spend extended time outside the city. The Urban League worked with the Fresh Air Fund to establish the first summer camp for Harlem residents in 1919, making it possible for one hundred and fifty boys to spend two weeks in Litchfield, Connecticut. Others followed in their footsteps each summer through the 1920s.⁶⁶ The YWCA offered the

other longest running summer camp, beginning in 1920, at Fern Rock, on the shore of Lake Tiorati in the Palisades Interstate Park.⁶⁷ By 1930, St Philips P. E. Church sent several hundred children aged eight to eighteen years to the 314-acre Camp Guilford Bower, in New Paltz, New York, eighty-five miles from Harlem; the North Harlem Community Council Camp sent one hundred children every two weeks to Livingston Manor, Sullivan County, an eighty-six acre camp; and the Harlem's Children's Fresh Air Fund sent fifty girls to spend two weeks at Camp James A. Farley, an eighty-seven acre property five miles east of Poughkeepsie, New York.⁶⁸

Adults also departed Harlem for summer camps. The YWCA's Fern Rock camp hosted young women as well as children. Beginning in 1929, the New York Business Academy, sponsored Camp Swastika, also on Lake Tiorati, offering business and professional people the opportunity for boating, hiking, fishing, camp fires, high diving, swimming across the lake, and "night parties with ukes and guitars and tin pans." The camp proved most popular with nurses and post office clerks, many of whom went for weekends rather than the longer period typical for children.⁶⁹ However, the men of Harlem's 369th New York Infantry Regiment went to camp for two full weeks each summer. Their destination was Camp Smith, in Peekskill, New York, for practice on the rifle range, maneuvers in the mountains, and evenings of parades and band concerts. Just over one thousand men made this trip in 1930. The 369th announced their departure and return by parading between their armory at 143rd Street and the train depot at East 125th.⁷⁰

Day trips to destinations closer to Harlem were a more widely shared summer activity. Social clubs gave up their weekly gatherings in favor of trips outside the neighborhood, and, particularly by late 1920s, to the beach.⁷¹ Beginning in the early 1920s, Rockaway in Long Island became Harlem's beach resort. Individuals travelled by train and bus, and church groups, Sunday schools, and social clubs chartered buses, typically on Thursdays, Sundays and holidays.⁷² By 1928, as visitors from New Jersey and Westchester county joined those from Harlem, blacks dominated the crowds bathing and playing games, displacing the white groups who had previously vacationed at Rockaway. In the process they claimed a black place amidst a landscape in which the *New York Age* saw "the various racial groups in New York...segregating themselves at separate beaches—the Jewish and Italian-Americans are the largest patrons of Coney Island, with the Irish and native American stock predominating at Brighton Beach, ...the Germans have the beaches at Throgg's Neck and City Island in the Bronx, with Rye Beach on Long Island Sound becoming the rendezvous of the upper class native whites."⁷³ However, while blacks dominated the crowds at Rockaway, whites owned the businesses, replicating the situation – and the interracial tensions – that occurred in Harlem.⁷⁴

The concern of whites in Rockaway to keep out black visitors is a reminder that the character of a place is defined not simply by who lives in its housing, but also by who spends time there. Segregated housing alone does not create a segregated community. Looking at patterns of everyday life shows the permeability of black Harlem's borders in the 1920s. Residents left to work and play, and whites entered to work and visit a range of institutions and patronize various forms of commercialized leisure. Exploring the

nature of the interracial encounters that resulted highlights limits to the black control of the community within the neighborhood. Residents experienced white economic and government power and violence in their daily lives, even as they created a range of places and institutions apart from whites. If not contained, black life in 1920s Harlem was constrained, neither entirely separate from whites nor free of their authority. As a result, Harlem in the 1920s was too racially variegated and contested a place to warrant the label of ghetto.

NOTES

¹ G. Osofsky, *Harlem: The Making of a Ghetto: Negro New York, 1890-1930*, 2nd ed., New York: Harper and Row, 1971. His concept of the ghetto reflects those being developed by social scientists in the 1960s. See M. Duneier, *Ghetto: The Invention of a Place, the History of an Idea*, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2016.

² K. McGruder, *Race and Real Estate: Conflict and Cooperation in Harlem, 1890-1920*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2015, pp. 11-12.

³ James Ford, *Slums and Housing*, vol. 1, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1936, pp. 317-20.

⁴ K. Miller, "The Causes of Segregation," *Current History* 25, 1927, 827-31.

⁵ W. Best, *Passionately Human, No Less Divine: Religion and Culture in Black Chicago, 1915-1952*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005; D. Baldwin, *Chicago's New Negroes: Modernity, the Great Migration, and Black Urban Life*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007; S. White, S. Garton, S. Robertson, and G. White, *Playing the Numbers: Gambling in Harlem Between the Wars*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010; C. Hicks, *Talk With You Like a Woman: African American Women, Justice, and Reform in New York, 1890-1935*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010; and L. Harris, *Sex Workers, Psychics, and Numbers Runners: Black Women in New York City's Underground Economy*, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2016.

⁶ S. Robertson, S. White, S. Garton, G. White, D. Evans, *Digital Harlem: Everyday Life, 1915-1930*, <<http://digitalharlem.org>> (accessed August 31, 2016); S. Robertson, "Putting Harlem on the Map," in K. Nawrotzki and J. Dougherty (eds) *Writing History in the Digital Age*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2013, pp. 186-97; and S.

Robertson, “Digital Mapping as a Research Tool: *Digital Harlem: Everyday Life, 1915-1930*,” *American Historical Review* 121, 2016, 156-66. The *Digital Harlem Blog* posts cited in this chapter contain images of maps created in *Digital Harlem*. Readers can also go to *Digital Harlem* and create interactive maps of the places and events referred to in this chapter.

⁷ S. King, *Whose Harlem Is This, Anyway? Community Politics and Grassroots Activism during the New Negro Era*, New York: New York University Press, 2015.

⁸ Baldwin, *Chicago’s New Negroes*, pp. 193-232.

⁹ King, *Whose Harlem Is This, Anyway?*, pp. 32-3.

¹⁰ *New York Times*, March 24, 1935, E11.

¹¹ S. Robertson, S. White, and S. Garton, “Harlem in Black and White: Mapping Race and Place in 1920s Harlem,” *Journal of Urban History* 39, 2013, 867-8.

¹² King, *Whose Harlem Is This, Anyway?*, pp. 53-4, 59-67; and M. Sacks, *Before Harlem: The Black Experience in New York City Before World War I*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006, pp. 108-14.

¹³ S. Robertson, S. White, S. Garton, and G. White, “This Harlem Life: Black Families and Everyday Life in the 1920s and 1930s,” *Journal of Social History* 44, 2010, 97-122;

S. Robertson, “Morgan Thompson – a West Indian Laborer’s Life in Harlem,” *Digital Harlem Blog*, 2009,

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August 31, 2016); and S. Robertson, “Perry Brown: A Lodge member’s life in Harlem,”

Digital Harlem Blog, 2010, <<https://digitalharlemblog.wordpress.com/2010/07/15/perry-brown-lodge-member/>> (accessed August 31, 2016).

¹⁴ King, pp. 64-7; Sacks, pp. 115-19.

¹⁵ S. Robertson, “Annie Dillard: Domestic Service & Single Motherhood in Harlem,” *Digital Harlem Blog*, 2011,
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¹⁸ Arthur Crosby, *New Code of Ordinances of the City of New York*, New York: Banks Law Publishing Company, 1922, pp. 408, 457,
<<http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uc2.ark:/13960/t7kp7xw87;view=1up;seq=415> >
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¹⁹ New York Urban League, *Twenty-Four Hundred Negro Families in Harlem: An Interpretation of the Living Conditions in Harlem* (May 1927) (Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library), pp. 26-7.

²⁰ S. Robertson, "Childcare in 1920s Harlem," *Digital Harlem Blog*, 2016,

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²² Robertson, "Childcare in 1920s Harlem."

²³ D. Ment, "Patterns of Public School Segregation, 1900-1940: A Comparative Study of New York City, New Rochelle, and New Haven," in R. Goodenow and D. Ravich (ed.), *Schools in Cities: Consensus and Conflict in American Educational History*, New York: Holmes and Meier, 1983, pp. 71-95; and *World*, July 1, 1928, 7.

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²⁵ *Afro American*, June 23, 1928, 5.

²⁶ Ment, "Patterns of Public School Segregation," pp. 86-92; and T. Harbison, "Part of the Problem or Part of the Solution? Harlem's Public Schools, 1914-1954," PhD. Dissertation, City University of New York, 2011, pp. 93, 170-81.

²⁷ New York Urban League, *Twenty-Four Hundred Negro Families in Harlem*, 26-7.

²⁸ Ment, "Patterns of Public School Segregation, 1900-1940," p. 72.

²⁹ *NYA*, September 8, 1928, 10; O. Lovejoy, *The Negro Children of New York*, New York: Children's Aid Society, 1932, 33-4.

³⁰ Robertson et al, "Harlem in Black and White," 871; S. Robertson, "Traffic Accidents in 1920s Harlem," *Digital Harlem Blog*, 2010,

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³¹ *NYA*, 8 September 1923, 2; *NYA*, 7 July 1928, 1; and *AN*, 16 April 1930, 14.

³² People vs. Otis Wilson, 1921, p. 344, *Trial Transcripts of the County of New York 1883–1927*, Case 2974, Roll 358 (John Jay College of Criminal Justice); *Afro-American*, 14 July 1928, 5.

³³ *AN*, March 25, 1925, 16.

³⁴ *AN*, July 23, 1930, 2.

³⁵ *NYA*, 28 July 28, 1928, 3; *Interstate Tattler*, January 4, 1929, 1.

³⁶ Robertson et al, “Harlem in Black and White,” 873-4.

³⁷ Robertson et al, “This Harlem Life,” 103, 115.

³⁸ W. Thurman, *Negro Life in New York’s Harlem*, Girard, Kansas: Haldemen-Julius Publications, 1927, pp. 35-8; Jervis Anderson, *This Was Harlem, 1900-1950*, New York: Farrar Straus, Giroux, 1981, pp. 110-11; and *Pittsburgh Courier*, December 3, 1927, 2. Similar patterns of movie exhibition and segregation were found in Chicago at this time. See M. Carbine, “‘The Finest Outside the Loop’: Motion Picture Exhibition in Chicago’s Black Metropolis, 1905-1928,” *Camera Obscura* 8, 1990, 8-41.

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⁴⁰ *AN*, July 30, 1930, 13.

⁴¹ Thurman, *Negro Life in New York’s Harlem*, pp. 24-32; Rudolph Fisher, “The Caucasian Storms Harlem,” *American Mercury*, 1927, 393, 395-6.

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⁴⁵ M. Pollard, "Harlem as is," MA dissertation, College of the City of New York, 1936, pp. 173-6, 187-99 (Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library).

⁴⁶ See, for example, *AN*, April 30, 1930, 14.

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⁵¹ *Pittsburgh Courier*, January 17, 1925, 8

⁵² A. Powell, *Upon This Rock*, p. 39; S. Robertson, "Catholics in 1920s Harlem," *Digital Harlem Blog*, 2010, <<https://digitalharlemblog.wordpress.com/2010/07/01/catholics-in-1920s-harlem/>> (accessed September 4, 2016).

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⁵⁴ See, for example, *NYA*, April 4, 1925, 5; *NYA*, April 5, 1930, 5.

⁵⁵ *NYA*, May 30, 1925, 6; *AN*, July 15, 1925, 5; *AN*, June 27, 1928, 7; *AN*, July 11, 1928, 6

⁵⁶ Robertson et al, "Harlem in Black and White," 869, 872-3; S. Robertson "Harlem and Baseball in the 1920s," *Digital Harlem Blog* (2011),

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⁵⁹ Shane White and Graham White, *Stylin': African American Expressive Culture, from Its Beginnings to the Zoot Suit*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999, p. 161.

⁶⁰ Robertson et al, "Harlem in Black and White," 869-71; and King, 173-86.

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⁶³ See, for example, *NYA*, July 25, 1925, 2; *NYA*, September 5, 1925, 10.

⁶⁴ *NYA*, June 16, 1928, 9; *NYA*, September 6, 1930, 2; *AN*, July 9, 1930, 9.

⁶⁵ *NYA*, 14 August 1926, 10; *AN*, July 9, 1930, 9.

⁶⁶ *NYA*, June 28, 1919, 2; *NYA* January 17, 1920, 2; *NYA* July 10, 1920, 6; *NYA* July 23, 1921, 8; *NYA* July 19, 1924, 10; *NYA*, February 15, 1930, 2.

⁶⁷ *NYA*, June 23, 1923, 8; *NYA* June 16, 1923, 8; *NYA*, August 4, 1923, 8; *AN* June 24, 1925; *AN*, July 1, 1925.

⁶⁸ *AN*, July 9, 1930, 5; Pollard, "Harlem as is," p. 196.

⁶⁹ *NYA*, June 22, 1929, 2; *NYA*, July 13, 1929, 2; *NYA*, August 30, 1930, 2.

⁷⁰ *AN*, September 24, 1930, 3; Robertson, "Parades in 1920s Harlem."

⁷¹ See, for example, *NYA* July 5, 1930, 5; *AN*, July 9, 1930, 10.

⁷² *AN*, August 17, 1927, 15; *AN*, August 9, 1931, 9.

⁷³ *NYA*, August 25, 1928, 7; *NYA*, August 3, 1929, 10.

⁷⁴ *AN*, May 13, 1925, 1; *AN*, August 10, 1927, 15; *AN*, August 17, 1927, 15; *AN*, August 31, 1927, 9.