

| New York City |

# THE CHANGING FACE OF HARLEM

Harlem sta lentamente cambiando colore: pur rimanendo sostanzialmente un quartiere black, i bianchi sono sempre più numerosi, attirati dagli affitti più ragionevoli rispetto a Manhattan e dall'atmosfera più intima. E anche se le sacche di povertà sono ancora diffuse, il periodo in cui Harlem era off-limits per i turisti è un lontano ricordo.

BY LORENZA CERBINI

B2 UPPER INTERMEDIATE



Harlem could be called "presidential." If we take the last three US presidents (Bill Clinton, George W. Bush and Barack Obama), two of them are associated with this famous New York neighbourhood<sup>1</sup>. And they are not the only successful Americans to have spent time here. Harlem is synonymous with the African-American experience (although there is also a Spanish Harlem and a Jewish Harlem). The days Harlem is, however, becoming increasingly<sup>2</sup> "white."

## ALL CHANGE

Harlem (which is the area of Manhattan to the north of Central Park) is changing dramatically<sup>3</sup>, in terms of real estate<sup>4</sup> (there are many new buildings under construction), as well as cultural (the new Harlem

Studio, for example), business (new restaurants, bars and offices) and social life. Traditionally, white Manhattanites lived to the south of Central Park (Midtown and Downtown), or else on the Park's "West Side" and "East Side." The rents<sup>5</sup> in those areas are now very high and people are moving "uptown" to Harlem. Former President Clinton began the trend when he left the White House in 2001. He opened his office and "Foundation" at 55 West 125th Street. Barack Obama's relationship

## GLOSSARY

- 1 **neighbourhood:** quartiere
- 2 **increasingly:** sempre più
- 3 **dramatically:** in misura eccezionale
- 4 **real estate:** immobili
- 5 **rents:** affitti
- 6 **proudly:** orgogliosamente
- 7 **mosques:** moschee
- 8 **used can machines:** depositi di lattine usate
- 9 **tough:** difficile





## INTERVIEW MY NEW HOME

In spite of its Dutch<sup>1</sup> name, Harlem has been a predominantly black neighbourhood for almost a century. Located in the northern section of Manhattan, it was the centre of African-American life, both for New York City and the United States. Between the First and Second World Wars it was famous for its jazz clubs and entertainment; after the 1960s it became a symbol of urban decline. In recent years Harlem has been changing again. White Americans are moving in. Italian-American Gina Soloperto, who runs<sup>2</sup> a creative management company called Glue, is a typical example. She moved to Harlem three years ago. We asked her why:

**Gina Soloperto**  
(Standard American accent)

I wanted to get out of the apartment that I was in on 87th Street because it was tiny<sup>3</sup>, it was too small, and I had a friend up in Harlem, on 115th Street, who (had) just bought a new condo<sup>4</sup> and asked me to take her lease over<sup>5</sup>. I went and saw the apartment immediately because it was two to three times bigger than my other apartment, and a better price. And I



Gina Soloperto is a white New Yorker who moved to Harlem for the affordable rent. Yet (right and opposite page) Harlem remains predominantly African American. Below: the H&M store. Opposite page, below: Barack Obama and Bill Clinton, two honorary Harlemites.

### GLOSSARY

- 1 **Dutch:** olandese
- 2 **runs:** gestisce
- 3 **tiny:** minuscolo
- 4 **condo:** appartamento (v. Speak Up explains)
- 5 **to take her lease over:** rilevare il suo contratto
- 6 **blocks:** isolati
- 7 **gorgeous:** splendido
- 8 **standpoint:** punto di vista



spent the day in the neighbourhood, touring the neighbourhood and meeting some of the people that lived there, and it felt like a real neighbourhood to me, so I chose to go there.

### ENERGY

We asked her for more details:

**Gina Soloperto**

I live on Manhattan Ave, 115th Street. Manhattan Ave is just west of Central Park, it's northwest of Central Park. I'm about about five blocks<sup>6</sup> north of Central Park and just east of Columbia University and Morningside Park. It's a beautiful neighbourhood, gorgeous<sup>7</sup>; I have two parks within five minutes of me in either direction. And I was really attracted to that from a logistics standpoint<sup>8</sup>, and then, from

with Harlem goes back to the early 1980s, when he was a student at Columbia (its campus is at 116th Street).

### POVERTY

Harlem is still predominantly black and proudly<sup>6</sup> hosts the country's largest African-American parade. Its gospel churches are world-famous and there are also mosques<sup>7</sup> like the Masjid Aqsa, which was founded in 1996.

Yet Harlem remains a poor neighbourhood. There is a massive H&M store, but very few boutiques. If you go to the subway station at East 125th Street, you will see people standing in line at the used can machines<sup>8</sup>, where they are happy to earn 5 cents for each of the empty cans they have collected. Life in Harlem is still tough<sup>9</sup>.





a community standpoint, it felt like a real neighbourhood, and it is a real neighbourhood. There are people that have lived there for generations and there are families and individuals from various different countries in Africa. We have big populations from Cote d'Ivoire, Senegal and Nigeria in our neighbourhood.

And it's a nice convergence of culture where you really see people finding that common ground<sup>9</sup> of human nature versus unique cultural identity, and we all have found a way to coexist together and get along<sup>10</sup>, and it's really nice to see how all these other cultures experience their day-to-day lives in New York City. It's a tough place to live at times<sup>11</sup>, especially when you're coming in from another country, or just another part of the US. You have to work hard to maintain a successful life here. So that energy is alive in the neighbourhood and it's kind of exciting.

## NO REGRETS

And is there anything negative about living in Harlem?

## Gina Soloperto

Transit<sup>12</sup>: so I have work and friends and business downtown; Lower Manhattan, SoHo, Tribeca, I have a lot of good friends in Brooklyn. I don't see them any more because nobody wants to come up to Harlem! It's not because they're afraid, it's it takes time and it's sort of the same reason why I don't go to Brooklyn or Queens too often because I have to plan for an hour plus commute<sup>13</sup> to get there. There are trains, but it just takes a long time. So, other than that, I have no complaints<sup>14</sup> about the neighbourhood; it's been very, very good to me. ☒



Above: a typical street market. Below right: restaurants. Top: some new white residents.

## GLOSSARY

- 9 common ground:** terreno comune
- 10 get along:** andare d'accordo
- 11 it's a tough place to live at times:** è un posto difficile in cui vivere, a volte
- 12 transit:** i mezzi pubblici
- 13 I have to plan for... commute:** devo organizzarmi in anticipo per un viaggio di oltre un'ora
- 14 complaints:** lamentele

**Condo.** Questo termine americano è un'abbreviazione di *condominium*. Ma mentre in italiano il condominio è un palazzo diviso in varie proprietà, negli Stati Uniti il *condo* è un singolo appartamento. Volendo si può dire anche *apartment*, mentre in Gran Bretagna si usa la parola *flat*.

**Transit.** I mezzi pubblici. Gli americani chiamano il trasporto pubblico *mass transit*: i britannici e gli altri popoli anglofoni dicono *public transport*. Un'altra differenza è la metropolitana (amer. *subway*, brit. *underground*); per gli inglesi *subway* è un sottopassaggio.

## SoHo, Tribeca.

A New York c'è la tendenza ad abbreviare i nomi dei quartieri: SoHo (South of Houston Street, Tribeca (Triangle Below Canal Street), NoLita (North of Little Italy). C'è anche un famoso quartiere di nome Soho a Londra, ma si scrive con la h minuscola.

## Speak Up EXPLAINS

## IF YOU GO...

### BARS AND RESTAURANTS

#### Red Rooster Harlem

redroosterharlem.com  
310 Malcolm X Boulevard  
(212) 792-9001

#### Melba's Restaurant

www.melbasrestaurant.com  
300 West 114th Street  
(212) 864-7777

#### Harlem Tavern

www.harlemtavern.com  
2153 Frederick Douglass Boulevard  
(212) 866-4500

### CLUBS AND CULTURAL VENUES

#### Lenox Lounge

www.lenoxlounge.com  
288 Malcolm X Boulevard  
(212) 427-0253

#### Shrine World Music Venue

www.shrinenyc.com  
2271 Adam Clayton Powell Jr Bl  
(212) 690-7807

#### Dance Theatre of Harlem

dancetheatreofharlem.org  
466 West 152nd Street  
(212) 690-2800

#### The Studio Museum in Harlem

www.studiomuseum.org  
144 West 125th Street #2

