



ZOOM

in on america

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A billboard above a local hardware store on Malcolm X Boulevard in the Harlem neighborhood of New York advertises new condos for sale a block away from Marcus Garvey Park from \$400,000 to \$4 million, Aug. 1, 2007. Photo © AP Images



Harlem, July 1980
Photo © AP Images



Harlem, Residential area
Photo © AP Images



Harlem in the 1960s, Photos © AP Images

Harlem

Harlem, now a neighborhood in New York City, first got its name from the Dutch settler Peter Stuyvesant, who named the settlement “Nieuw Haarlem” in the mid 17th century after the Dutch city of Haarlem. The name was later anglicized to “Harlem” when the British took control of the area in 1664.

Modern day Harlem stretches from the East River to the Hudson River, north of New York City’s Central Park. Its modern development began in the 1880s with the construction of railroads that connected it with the city of New York. This period was marked by the rapid growth of housing complexes. The beginning of the twentieth century brought a mass migration of African-Americans into Harlem due to a real estate crash in New York which worsened conditions for African-Americans elsewhere in the city. An important reason for the migration was also the influence of an African-American real estate entrepreneur, Phillip Payton, Jr., who brought African-Americans to fill houses in the district during a mass exodus of white inhabitants from Harlem.

This was a period of prosperity for Harlem, called the “Harlem Renaissance.” The district became a center of African-American culture with a plethora of entertainment ven-

ues, including speakeasies, lounges, cafes, supper clubs, theaters, and dance halls, that pulsed with life and drew crowds of people. Strangely enough, the best of establishments, such as the “Cotton Club”, where Duke Ellington was a performer, and the “Savoy Ballroom” were for white guests only.

The 1930s and 40s brought riots and unrest to Harlem and put an end to its reign as an entertainment center. It ceased to be a safe place and a slow process of deterioration began. Over the following years, little was invested into the district, crime rose, and the overall condition of its buildings and infrastructure became increasingly worse. Perhaps the worst time for Harlem was the 1970s when there was an exodus of people who were able to afford better housing elsewhere, accompanied by an increase in the crime rate.

An attempt to revitalize the district, known as “gentrification,” started in the 1990s. Since this time, the implementation of strict rules to fight crime and new business investment have begun to turn the district around.

Text by AIRC Krakow

Click to listen:

<http://stream.state.gov/streamvol/libmedia/krakow/10474/audio/harlem.wma>

Madame C.J. Walker - "A Self-Made Woman"



"I am a woman who came from the cotton fields of the South. From there I was promoted to the wash-tub. From there I was promoted to the cook kitchen. And from there I promoted myself into the business of manufacturing hair goods and preparations....I have built my own factory on my own ground."

This is how Madame C. J. Walker described her path to success at the 1912 National Negro Business League Convention. Her story is truly one of rags to riches. From her humble beginnings of picking cotton in the South, she later went on to become one of the most successful woman entrepreneurs of her time and a millionaire - the first self-made female millionaire in the United States. Here is her story.

Born Sarah Breedlove in 1867 to emancipated slaves and then orphaned at the age of 7, Walker learned about poverty and the hardships of life early on. She did not have the chance to receive much education in her youth and worked hard to earn a living. At the age of fourteen, she married

Moses McWilliams, and at eighteen she had her first child, a daughter named Lelia. A year later she became a widow.

She worked very hard, and due to stress and a scalp illness she started losing her hair at an early age. This hardship came to play an important role in her future success. Preoccupied with how to help her hair, the future Madame Walker experimented with creating a healing formula for hair and finally found one that worked. It also worked for her friends and acquaintances. She started selling the product and made some decent income from it.

In 1905, she married Charles Joseph Walker, a Denver newspaperman, took his name and began to call herself Madame C. J. Walker, a name that would later become famous. Her husband helped her develop mail marketing techniques through African-American newspaper owners in order to sell more of her products. Madame Walker then went on to found the Madame C.J. Walker Manufacturing Company and organized a group of sales people, the so called "Walker Agents," to build a distribution net.

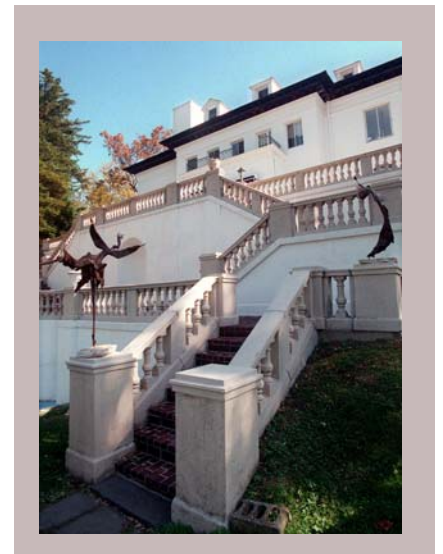
Madame Walker is also remembered for the improvements she made to a special hair straightening comb used by African-American women who did not want their hair to curl. Previously, many African-American women had used ironing boards to straighten their hair, a practice which could be dangerous and unhealthy for hair. Most importantly, however, Madame Walker made cosmetics: ointment (pomade) that added softness and shine to hair, tonic that helped it grow, and conditioners for some scalp ailments. Later, she added facial creams, toiletries and fragrances to her range of products.

She also opened a shop and a beauty school that taught the "Walker Method of hair straightening and hair growing."

Although Madame Walker's cosmetic empire was stationed in Indianapolis, where she had her first factory, she moved to Harlem in 1916 and opened a chain of beauty salons there.

Madame C. J. Walker was not only a business woman; she was also an activist who energetically supported the causes of African-Americans. She was a supporter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and numerous charities. She funded scholarships for women at various colleges and institutes. Unfortunately, this active life led to a premature death. She died of a kidney failure resulting from hypertension on May 24, 1919 at the age of 52.

Text by AIRC Krakow



*The Villa Lewaro, the legacy of the country's first self-made female millionaire, Madam Walker, is seen Oct. 19, 1998, in Irvington, N.Y. The house became a meeting place for black leaders and entertainers, but Walker lived there barely a year, dying in 1919 in the master bedroom.
Photo © AP Images*

Click to listen: <http://stream.state.gov/streamvol/libmedia/krakow/10474/audio/madame.wma>

**Where Stars
Are Born
&
Legends Are
Made**



Photo © AP Images

On Seventh Avenue in Harlem, New York, there once grew a very special tree. It earned itself the name "Tree of Hope."

Aspiring actors, dancers and performers heading

for the Lafayette Theater - a popular meeting place for African-American stage talents waiting to be discovered - would halt and stand under its branches for it was believed that the tree brought good luck. In 1934 when the Apollo Theater opened, the avenue was broadened and the Tree of Hope was cut down.

And yet there is still hope for those aspiring to enter showbiz. The very same theater, the Apollo Theater, stages an "Amateur Night" each Wednes-

day, when anyone can have their 90 seconds on stage before an audience. This audience, however, is not a kind, understanding crowd. On the contrary, the Apollo audiences are famous for their ability to show enthusiasm as well as disapproval in very unambiguous ways. The Theater clearly notifies aspiring performers of this reality: *"The love from our audience can transform amateurs into entertainment giants, as witnessed by the success of James Brown, Fat Joe, Michael Jackson, Lauryn Hill, Gladys Knight, and the legion of other legends who began as amateurs at the Apollo. But performing before a Showtime crowd can be daunting for the less than determined. Many acts are known to lose their nerve mid-*

performance and get booed off the famous stage." Future artists, be warned!

Indeed, at one time, the Theater employed "the executioner" whose job was to remove a performer who was demanded off stage by the audience. He did this with the help of a broom.

The Apollo Theater has shared all the ups and downs of Harlem: the boom of the 1930s and the deterioration in the 1970s. In 2005/2006 the Apollo's façade was refurbished and a new light-emitting marquee was installed.

The Apollo Theater is listed in the National Register of Historic Places and is one of the top attractions and landmarks of New York City.

The list of vocalists, bands, gospel singers, musicians, dancers, comedians, actors and other personalities who got their start at this theater is long and by no means complete with the following names: Ella Fitzgerald, Billie Holiday, James Brown, Diana Ross & The Supremes, Gladys Knight & The Pips, The Jackson 5, Patti LaBelle, Marvin Gaye, Luther Vandross, Stevie Wonder, Aretha Franklin, Mariah Carey, The Isley Brothers, Lauryn Hill, Sarah Vaughan, Ben. E. King, Jackie Wilson, Dru Hill, and Blu Cantrell, as well as the others mentioned earlier in the article.

Text by AIRC Krakow

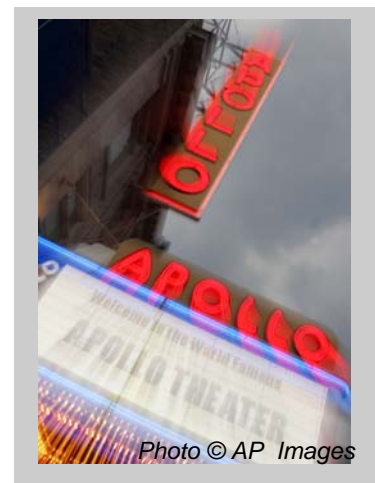
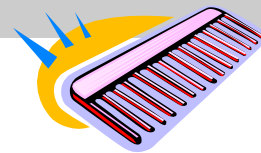


Photo © AP Images

Click to listen: <http://stream.state.gov/streamvol/libmedia/krakow/10474/audio/apollo.wma>

Activity Page



Win a Prize!

FEBRUARY 2008
CONTEST

What word is missing?

“Hair” is to humans as
“...” are to birds

Send the answer (with
your home address) to:
zoom@usinfo.pl

Deadline: March 5

Win a Prize!

The answer in the
January 2008 Contest
was:

- **Alaska** -

Thank you for
participating

The winners are:

Piotr, Miranda and
Bogusława

CONGRATULATIONS

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Let's split hairs over a hair in our soup:

According to Emily Post's "Etiquette" book, when you notice a hair in your food, if it's "not upsetting to you", you should remove it "without calling attention to it and go on eating". If, however, it upsets your stomach, you may "leave the dish untouched rather than embarrass your hostess in a private home". Should you find a hair in your ordered dish in a restaurant, you should indeed "point out the error to your waiter and ask for a replacement."

Exercise 1



With another student (or two other students) act out a conversation in a restaurant as if the situation above had happened to you.

Do you know anybody who:

has **curly brown hair**, likes a **crew cut**, wears a **side part**, is **balding**, has jet **black hair**, is a **blonde**, has **highlights**, combs his/her hair **forward**, likes wearing **wigs**, fastens her hair with **ribbons or grips**, is a **redhead**, has **dyed** their hair blue, is **graying**, has a **ponytail**, has never worn a **fringe**, wears her hair in a **bun**, dislikes their **curly hair**, or who **back-combs** their hair?

Exercise 2

Describe a couple of people you know who pay special attention to their hair. What do they do to their hair?

Exercise 3

Comprehension. Answer these questions about the articles you have read in February's *Zoom in on America*:

1. What coincidence led to Madame C. J. Walker's discovery of a healing hair formula?
2. Who helped Madame Walker sell her products?
3. Did Mrs. Walker once work as a laundress? Can you find a supporting quote in the text?
4. Why would aspiring African-American performers stand under the "Tree of Hope"?
5. Who can perform on stage at the Apollo Theater on Wednesday nights?
6. What kind of audience watches "Amateur Night"?
7. What were the reasons behind the migration of African-Americans into Harlem at the beginning of the 20th century?
8. Why did Harlem lose its status as the entertainment capital?
9. What prospects does Harlem face in the future?

Glossary - (in the order of appearance)

plethora - an excess of
speakeasy - (during Prohibition) an illicit nightclub selling liquor
deterioration - worsening
entrepreneur - a person who organizes and runs a business
emancipated - (here) freed from slavery
orphaned - left without parents who have died
scalp - the skin covering the head
ointment - smooth oily preparation that is rubbed on the skin for medicinal purposes or as a cosmetic
ailment - illness
fragrance - a pleasant, sweet smell
premature - happening too early
halt - come to a stop
unambiguous - not open to more than one interpretation
daunting - seeming difficult to deal with, intimidating
boo - an utterance showing disapproval
marquee - rooflike projection over the entrance to a theater, hotel, or other building

Find answers to activities on this page at www.usinfo.pl/zoom/