



**Landmarks Preservation  
Commission**

**Backlog Initiative: Addressing 95 Properties**  
Manhattan B Group 2 Items

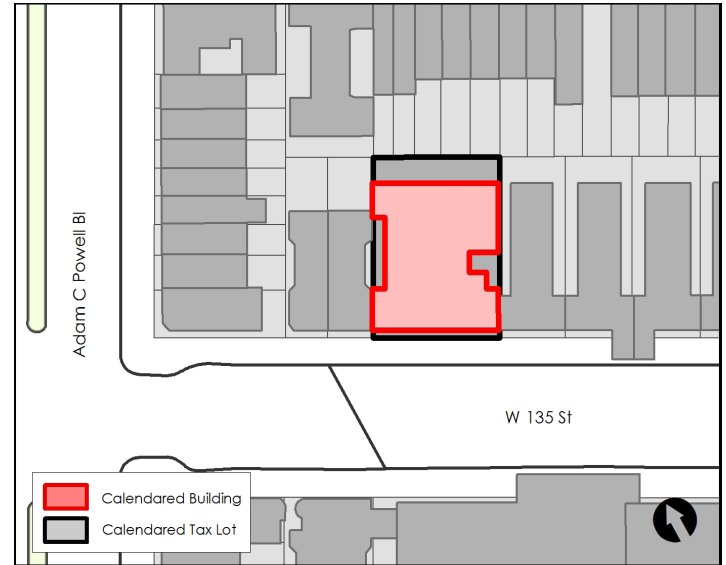
**Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) Building, Harlem  
Branch (now Jackie Robinson YMCA Youth Center)**

181 West 135th Street, Manhattan  
Manhattan Block: 01920 Lot: 0007

Manhattan Community Board 10  
Public Hearing Date(s): 7/15/1991



Photos 2014



**Special Public Hearings**

The Landmarks Preservation Commission will hold a public hearing on the backlog of buildings in the Borough of Manhattan on **November 12, 2015** and encourages interested parties to submit written testimony in advance of that hearing. Each speaker will be given three minutes total to speak, and in that time may address all of the items within Manhattan B Group 2, just particular items, or add comments to support written testimony. In order to conduct efficient hearings, we ask speakers to register in advance, and submit their written statements and materials that will be read at the hearing by **November 5, 2015** to [backlog95@lpc.nyc.gov](mailto:backlog95@lpc.nyc.gov). If you are unable to attend the hearing, your written submissions will be entered into the record and distributed to the Commissioners.

If you have questions about this property or the hearing process please contact [backlog95@lpc.nyc.gov](mailto:backlog95@lpc.nyc.gov) or call (212) 669-7817. If you would like more information about this property, please see the research file summary (over) and go to our website (<http://www.nyc.gov/html/lpc/html/backlog95>) and click on the link for this building's research file.



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**Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) Building, Harlem Branch (now Jackie Robinson YMCA Youth Center) Description**

Landmark Type: Individual

Built: 1918

Architect: John Jackson

Style: Neo-Renaissance

**Research Staff Hearing Statement (1991)**

**YOUNG MEN'S CHRISTIAN ASSOCIATION (YMCA) BUILDING, HARLEM BRANCH**  
(now Jackie Robinson YMCA Youth Center), 181 West 135th Street, Manhattan

Located on the north side of West 135th Street between Adam Clayton Powell Jr. Blvd. and Lenox Avenue, this branch of the YMCA was built in 1918 and designed by John Jackson, who was also the architect of the Downtown Community House, a settlement house built in 1925-26, located at 105 Washington Street.

The branch of the YMCA for black New Yorkers was originally located on West 53rd Street, and the construction of the Harlem branch followed the migration of African-Americans there in the early twentieth century. By the mid-1920s, the area around West 135th Street and Seventh Avenue had become the hub of black intellectual and social life in New York City, and the YMCA building became the focal point of black political and literary activity. Lectures were given, plays and music performed, and classes in liberal arts and industrial skills were offered. Among the noteworthy individuals associated with the YMCA of Harlem were the writers Claude McKay, John Henrik Clarke, Langston Hughes, and Ralph Ellison. The YMCA served as the headquarters or meeting place for such organizations as the National Coordinating Committee on Civil Rights, the New York Chapter of the Negro Technical Association, and the Harlem Writers' Workshop. Demand for the YMCA's facilities and services led to the construction of a large new building across the street at 180 West 135th Street in 1931-32, making the Harlem YMCA among the largest black "Y" organizations in the United States.

The design of this building, in a restrained neo-Renaissance style, is based on that of an Italian palazzo. The high base with alternating arched and rectangular openings is surmounted by a cornice bearing the inscription "Young Men's Christian Association." Arched windows at the second story and an arcade at the sixth story further enhance the design.