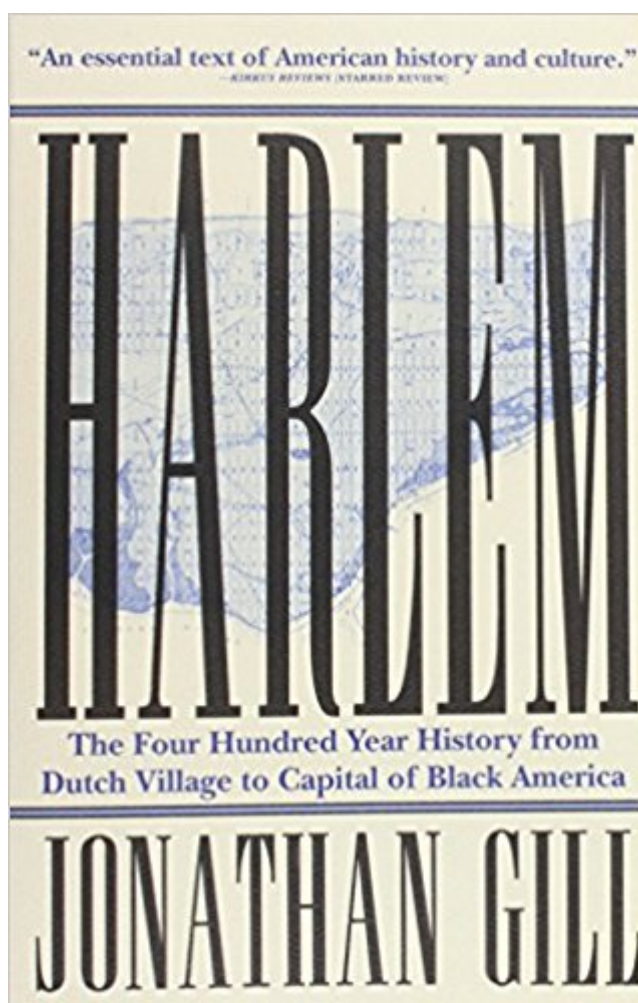


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# Harlem: The Four Hundred Year History From Dutch Village To Capital Of Black America



## Synopsis

Harlem is perhaps the most famous, iconic neighborhood in the United States. A bastion of freedom and the capital of Black America, Harlem's twentieth century renaissance changed our arts, culture, and politics forever. But this is only one of the many chapters in a wonderfully rich and varied history. In Harlem, historian Jonathan Gill presents the first complete chronicle of this remarkable place. From Henry Hudson's first contact with native Harlemites, through Harlem's years as a colonial outpost on the edge of the known world, Gill traces the neighborhood's story, marshaling a tremendous wealth of detail and a host of fascinating figures from George Washington to Langston Hughes. Harlem was an agricultural center under British rule and the site of a key early battle in the Revolutionary War. Later, wealthy elites including Alexander Hamilton built great estates there for entertainment and respite from the epidemics ravaging downtown. In the nineteenth century, transportation urbanized Harlem and brought waves of immigrants from Germany, Italy, Ireland, and elsewhere. Harlem's mix of cultures, extraordinary wealth and extreme poverty was electrifying and explosive. Extensively researched, impressively synthesized, eminently readable, and overflowing with captivating characters, Harlem is an ambitious, sweeping history, and an impressive achievement.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Historian Gill documents Harlem's transformation from the early days of Dutch settlements and farms to its apogee as the site of one of the 20th century's most influential musical and literary

flowerings in a dense, deftly told history. The author takes us from colonial Harlem, so strategically important in the American Revolution, to the 20th-century crucible of African-American arts and intellectual development, a place so vaunted that "Negroes wanted to go to Harlem the way the dead wanted to go to heaven." He invokes a veritable who's who of the black arts and intelligentsia who either called the neighborhood home or launched their careers in its embrace. Gill's analysis of Harlem's decline in the 1970s and the concomitant unemployment and crime is thorough, although his account of the Black Panthers and his analysis of the era's various "disturbances"--particularly a 1967 riot following a fatal episode of police brutality--wants a more nuanced interpretation. From the 1994 economic revitalization to the specter of gentrification, Gill makes a persuasive case that "change is Harlem's defining characteristic," and readers of this vibrant history will appreciate every step of its singular evolution. (Feb.) (c) Copyright PWxyz, LLC. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

**\*Starred Review\*** How did Harlem evolve from a Dutch colonial outpost to the most storied of African American neighborhoods? History and literature scholar Gill offers an exquisitely detailed account of the 400-year history of Harlem. Gill tracks Henry Hudson's accidental encounter with the island of Manahatta as he searched for China, the struggle between the Dutch and the British to claim the area, the Revolutionary War, and the later establishment of wealthy estates. He chronicles the waves of immigrants in the nineteenth century, who added to the pulse and texture of the developing urban culture. In the twentieth century, as African Americans migrated from the South and the West Indies, they began to dominate the culture, and the Harlem Renaissance put its indelible stamp on the neighborhood. Gill details major figures from George Washington and Alexander Hamilton to Langston Hughes, Marcus Garvey, and Malcolm X as well as the vibrancy of music, art, literature, religion, politics, and urban sensibility that has come to signify Harlem. Richly researched, the book details the particular blend of street-corner preaching and political proselytizing as well as the drive of black commerce and civil rights that also have come to signify African American Harlem. A vibrant, well-paced, engaging history of an iconic neighborhood. --Vanessa Bush --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Having been born in Harlem, loved it, studied it, and penned my own experience of growing up there in the 1950s and `60s, I thought I knew, at least a little bit about everything there was to know about my beloved community. Jonathan Gill's comprehensive book, *Harlem: The Four Hundred Year History From Dutch Village to Capital of Black America*, disabused me of that misconception. Gill has

written a "complete" history starting with Henry Hudson sailing up the Hudson River in 1609, and ending with the 2009 relocation of founding father, Alexander Hamilton's historic home which, until its move around the corner and down the hill, sat across the street from my house. Sometimes Gill's detail is sometimes excessive, but his breezy tidbits make up for it. A few examples: Madam Jumel (once married to Aaron Burr) was said to be the model for Dickens' character, Mrs. Havisham. The term "hot dog" was reportedly coined at the Polo Grounds stadium in 1901 because center field ended 483 feet away, thus "... making a home run there a near impossibility." In 1904, it took 31 minutes to travel by subway from 125th St. to 145th. Four hundred years of history is a lot to cram into one book, especially a beguiling place like Harlem with its larger-than-life reputation. A mere dot on a map, Harlem only measures about three square tucked-away miles on the upper part of an island empire and, at least in recent decades, has largely been maligned and often ignored by the ruling class. Gill does not skimp on Harlem's hellish years, but he also captures its vibe and enormous influence on music, religion, the arts, literature, fashion, sports, cuisine, politics, migration, and its involvement in both racial strife and ethnic diversity. I'm happy to have finally read this encyclopedia-like compendium. It's scholarly, but generally easy reading. Some of the transitions are not always smooth, and because his footnotes were so voluminous, he does not list them at the back of the book; instead, he directs readers to his website, which is no longer easy to find. Many times I wanted to look up a reference while reading, but wasn't near a computer, and even if I was, looking things up is a lot to ask when you're already trying to get through 450 pages.

Sugar Hill: Where The Sun Rose Over Harlem

I found this to be a very informative and detailed history of Harlem, the neighborhood on Manhattan Island from 145th Street in the south to 155th street in the north with Edgecomb Avenue to the east and Amsterdam Avenue to the west. The author provides very historical details from the settlement of Manhattan by the Dutch right up to the present time. I have to confess I felt overwhelmed by the numerous details. An example would be cartoonist Thomas Nast who was responsible for the elephant being the logo for the Republican party in addition to the caricature of Santa Claus. Author Gill provides us with the history of iconic landmarks such as the Polo Grounds, home to the New York Giants through the 1957 season, the Apollo Theatre, and the Morris-Jumel mansion. Several individuals from the entertainment world such as George and Ira Gershwin, the Marx brothers, Billie Holiday, Bert Williams, "Fats" Waller, Duke Ellington, and Paul Robeson are given their deserved space in any history of Harlem. New York Giants' iconic center fielder Willie Mays, Adam Clayton Powell, Malcolm Little (better known as Malcolm X), boxer Sugar Ray Robinson, and also Harlem

resident former President Bill Clinton are also deservedly included. Some details are also provided regarding the conviction and execution of Officer Charles Becker and the gangsters involved in the murder of Herman Rosenthal. Author Jonathan Gill deserves a lot of credit for the enormous amount of detail he provides on the history of Harlem. He has done a thorough job. However, speaking for myself, I found the detail excessive and I did find myself getting bogged down at times getting through it all. This is a five star book, but for me personally, I must give it four stars indicating that "I like it."

This is a very detailed history of that section of Manhattan known as Harlem. From the first settlements at the lower tip of the island, to the first few farms "uptown," the author writes about the development of one of the most recognizable places in the world. Mr. Gill covers everything from the first efforts to farm, to the great migrations that affected Harlem, to the music, dance, and entertainment center it became - and everything in between, before, and after. Sometimes the street names became a little tedious for me, because I don't live there and am not too familiar with those streets except in a general idea of where they are. Actually, I was drawn to this book by the fact that my son lives in Harlem, near the Abyssinian Baptist Church! Now I feel I know his neighborhood very well!

Great if you are familiar with the NYC, lower Hudson Valley area of New York, which I am. Otherwise, I'm not sure if you would enjoy it unless you are a history fan.

I loved the book. It was full of information and brought back fond memories of when I and my family lived in New York.

Listened to this on a long drive. It kept me wanting to hear more.

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