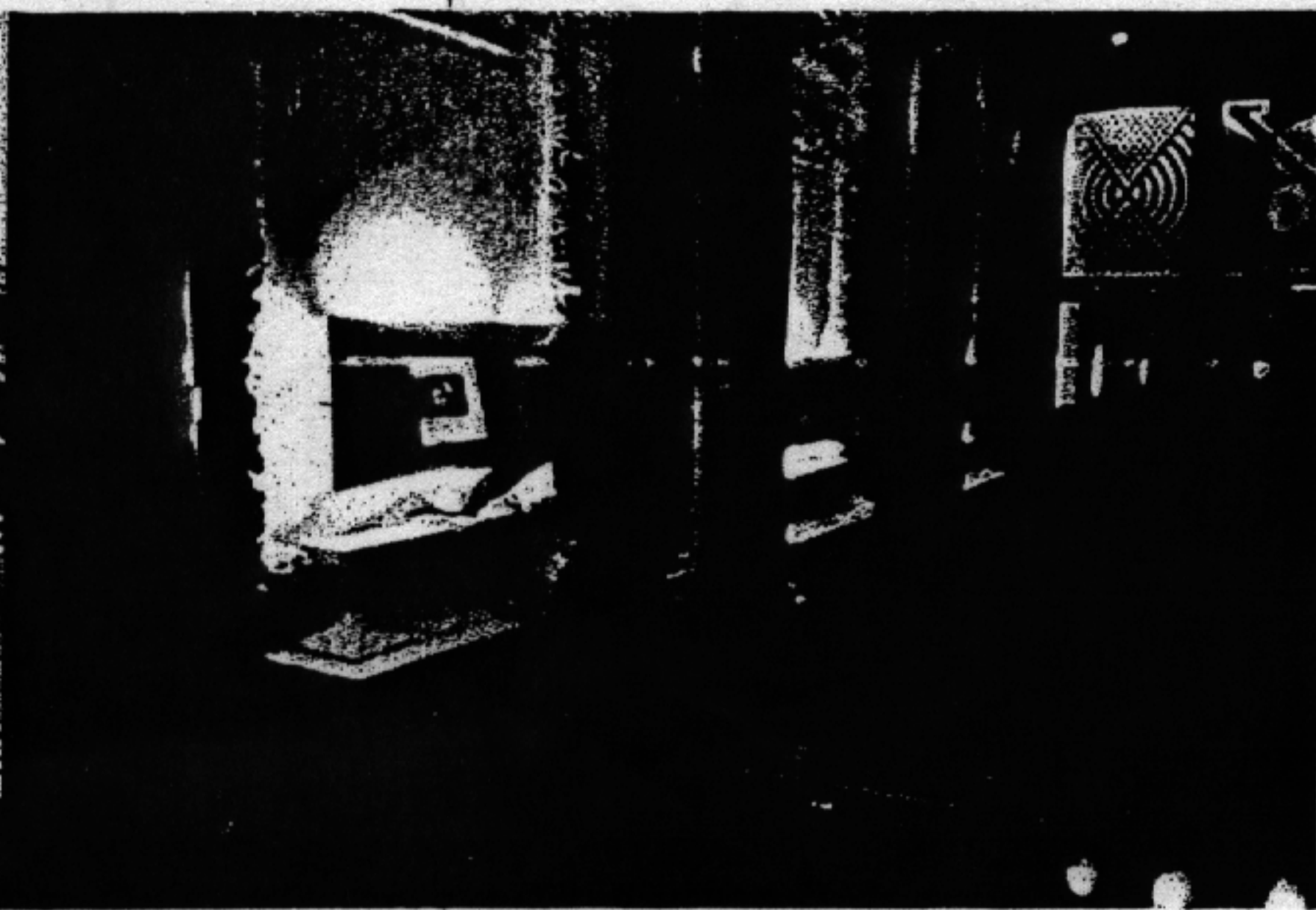
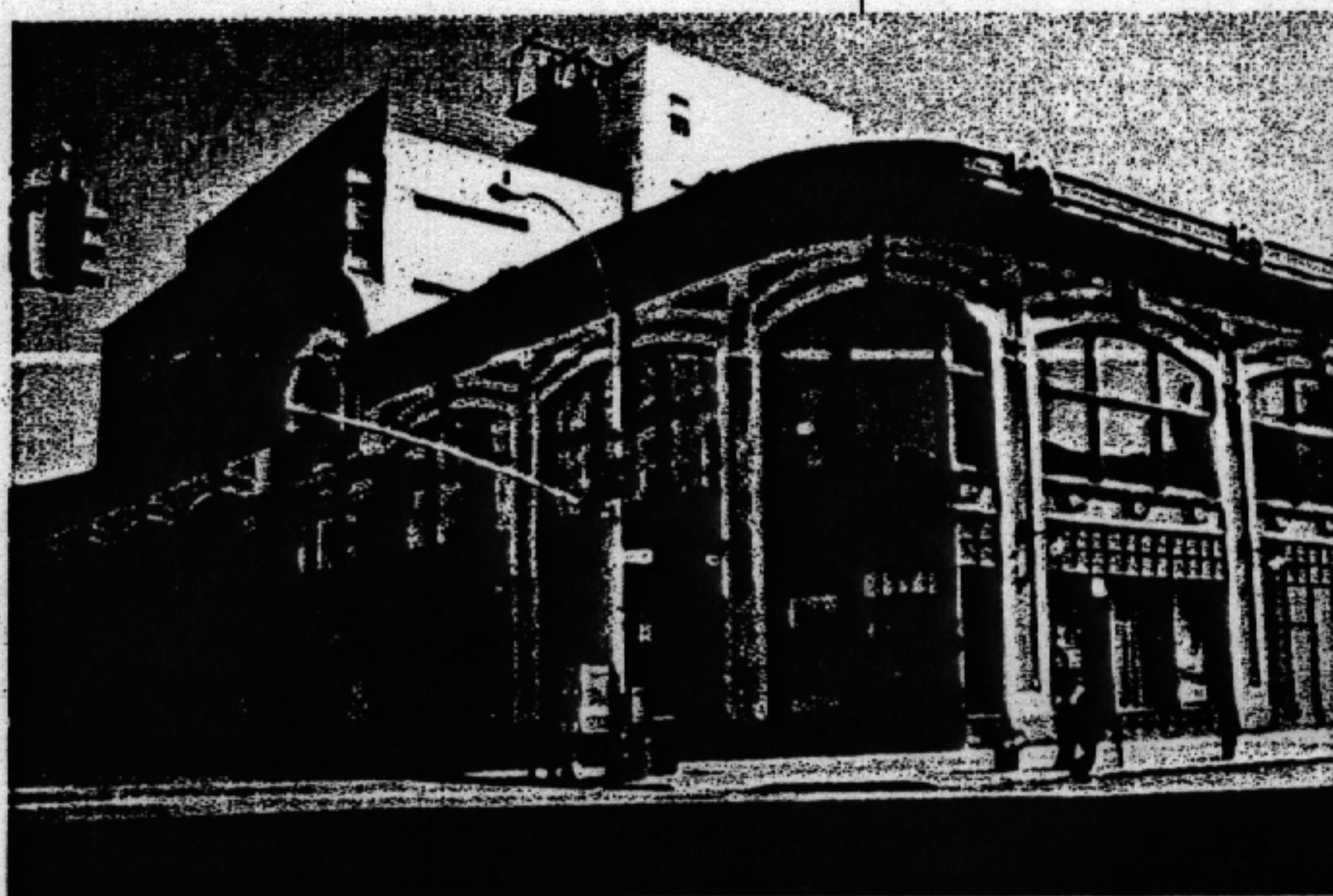


# GALLERY

## Renovated Audubon Ballroom Honors Legacy of Malcolm X



The newly refurbished Audubon Ballroom, where Malcolm X was assassinated in 1965, is now home to the Malcolm X and Betty Shabazz Memorial and Educational Center. The center features several interactive kiosks, right, on Malcolm X's life.

**W**hen the Audubon Ballroom and its ballroom in 1912 in upper Manhattan was an immediate sensation, its grand ballroom staged lively parties and entertainment from the era's top vaudeville and jazz artists. The space later hosted meetings for organizations such as the Transport Workers Union. And by 1964, El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz, the dynamic Black nationalist and human rights activist known as Malcolm X, held rallies there for his newly formed Organization of Afro-American Unity (OAAU).

In February 1965, Malcolm X was gunned down at the Audubon. Three of his six daughters — Ilyasah, Malaak and Gamilah Shabazz — returned to the Audubon earlier this year to mark the 40th anniversary of their father's assassination and to announce the opening of the Malcolm X and Dr. Betty Shabazz Memorial and Educational Center.

"It is a special place of triumph and of honor, transforming the site of the tragic assassination of my father into an oasis of support for the ongoing struggle for social justice," says Ilyasah Shabazz.

But transforming the Audubon has been a struggle in itself.

In the 1970s, the Audubon became the property of the city of New York. In 1983, Columbia University obtained the site and later sought to demolish it to build a high-tech facility. In the face of public pressure, former Mayor David Dinkins worked out a compromise that

allowed for the construction of the biomedical building, the creation of medical scholarships at Columbia and the preservation of sections of the Audubon.

Before her death, Betty Shabazz monitored the ballroom's refurbishing, which was led by prominent Black architect J. Max Bond Jr., and reportedly cost the city \$19 million. Yet plans for the memorial stalled after Shabazz was killed in a fire set by her grandson Malcolm in 1998.

Columbia has finally completed the Audubon renovation, which includes six flat-screen interactive kiosks, produced by one of the university's multimedia production units, Digital Knowledge Ventures (DKV).

The center transforms the site of the tragic assassination into an oasis of social justice.

The kiosks include a detailed timeline and fresh reflections from noted contemporaries such as the late Ossie Davis and poet Sonia Sanchez.

"It was intimidating trying to capture the many facets of Malcolm's life," says Vivian Ducat, executive editor at DKV. "We tried to keep in mind the issues he addressed and the key places in his life."

Columbia historian Manning Marable came up with the kiosks' design and intellectual concept.

"I'm somewhat pleased with the final product," Marable says. "If we had several more months, the content could have been much more richer."

A more comprehensive collection of Malcolm's personal belongings, including rare photos, documents, notebooks and speeches, will be open to the public this fall at the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture in Harlem.

Howard Dodson, chief of the Schomburg, says he hopes the new Audubon center will serve "as a place for both present and future generations to address, and hopefully solve, some of the same issues Malcolm and Dr. Shabazz grappled with and explored."

Ilyasah hopes the same.

"My desire is that visitors will leave the center with a better understanding of an exemplary man who was selfless in his commitment to resolve the issues of social injustice," she says.

But much remains to be done — from selecting the center's executive director to setting a yearly budget.

Herman Ferguson, 84, who co-founded OAAU with Malcolm X, applauds the creation of a memorial, but has reservations.

"Too often, tributes don't capture Malcolm as he really was. He wasn't a civil rights leader and often said so. He was fighting to secure our rights at a higher level — our basic human rights," explains Ferguson, chairman of the Malcolm X Commemoration Committee. "Malcolm's revolutionary message was never approved by the mainstream."

Curtis Stephen is a freelance journalist in New York.