Introduction to the New Edition

The *Harlem On My Mind* exhibition at The Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1969 was the most controversial exhibition presented in an American art museum in the last 100 years. It transformed museums, compelling them to open their galleries to subjects and audiences they had excluded.

The exhibition generated such controversy because it brought African-American history and culture to one of the world's preeminent art museums and placed it on a par with the established icons of the Western tradition. The interpretation of minority American cultures had until then been relegated to ethnographic museums, where they were presented as "primitive." The Metropolitan was the first American art museum to schedule a major exhibition devoted to the accomplishments of the living people of a non-Anglo, so-called minority culture. That alone was enough to provoke vociferous reactions from traditional supporters of elitist cultural institutions—an elite that would have preferred to see the museum remain a dusty warehouse where only the cognoscenti could observe and contemplate great works of art.

The original book *Harlem On My Mind,* which served as the exhibition catalogue, became a flash point because of statements considered to be anti-Semitic in the introduction, written by a seventeen-year-old Harlem high school student. This ignited a now-familiar political phenomenon: tension between blacks and Jews. Reactions became so intense that the New York City Council threatened to cut off funds to the Metropolitan unless the catalogue was withdrawn from sale. After selling a thousand books a day for fourteen days, the Museum capitulated and relegated them to storage in the basement.

How did I get involved with Harlem and the exhibition? In 1966 I created at The Jewish Museum *The Lower East Side: Portal to American Life,* an exhibition which documented the lives and experiences of Eastern European Jews. The director of the New York City Commission on Human Rights asked me to take two Harlem ministers through *The Lower East Side* exhibition. When they left, I said to myself, if blacks are interested in the history of the Lower East Side, everyone will certainly be interested in the history of Harlem. If telling the story of poor immigrant Jews in the former Warburg mansion at 92nd and Fifth Avenue was of interest, telling the story of blacks in Harlem should also be of interest, and should happen at the Met.

Thomas Hoving, a medieval scholar turned populist, was Mayor John Lindsay's parks commissioner. He was revitalizing parks throughout the city and bringing people back in record numbers. I became acquainted with Hoving when I wrote an article for *New York* magazine in which I argued that Huntington Hartford should not be permitted to build a restaurant at the southeast corner of Central Park. Hoving used my article to support his rejection of the pavilion. When appointed director of the Metropolitan Museum, Hoving promised to bring new life to this slumbering giant. In an impromptu telephone conversation, I described the Harlem exhibition to him in early 1967 and he said, "I'll buy it."

While thinking about the exhibition, I also began planning a book. I approached Harris Lewine, art director of the *Lower East Side* book, with my proposal to do a Harlem book. Together, we presented it to Arthur Cohen, my editor at Holt, Rinehart and Winston, who said he would like to publish it.

These were heady times for the New York white community. Anything seemed possible; everything was being questioned; experimentation was rampant. There was optimism, long hair, miniskirts, gays and lesbians coming out, all while the Vietnam War dragged on and protests continued. The New York art scene burgeoned with energy, ideas, and possibilities. The Abstract Expressionists had reached their zenith and Pop Art, personified by Andy Warhol, demonstrated a sea of changing values.

The Lower East Side show created a new exhibition aesthetic. The museum's galleries were converted into orchestrated information environments utilizing photo blow-ups, with film projections accompanied by amplified sounds complementing the still images. Tony Schwartz, the wizard of recorded sound, had a library of Lower East Side sounds; he made a series of tapes appropriate for each room. We made a film of Zero Mostel reading *Bintel Briefs,* letters to the editor of the *Daily Forward,* in which immigrants

described the traumas and joys of their lives. Instead of sitting in a movie theater watching projected images with a sound track, museum visitors could experience similar sensations moving through three-dimensional spaces. Although there had been a gallery of paintings in *The Lower East Side* exhibition, I felt that they detracted from the kind of experience I wanted to create, and decided to use only photographs in the Harlem exhibition.

I wanted to bring a similar exhibition aesthetic to bear on *Harlem On My Mind*. Tom Hoving never deviated in his support of my view of the exhibition as a communications environment, without artifacts, depicting the history of Harlem. Although we never discussed it, I assumed that we both saw the exhibition as an opportunity to change museums. They were elitist institutions that catered to limited audiences. I wanted to see them expand their range to embrace subjects and people they had excluded. This meant making white cultural institutions more accessible to blacks and providing black professionals with new opportunities within museums. Museums were then seen as places for contemplation of works of art. I wanted them to become an active crossroads for all sectors of the community, where cultural phenomena were interpreted through the use of communications technology. This exhibition, one of the first to use such technology, generated a considerable amount of hostility in 1969; it has since become an accepted norm.

1967 was a turbulent year. The anti–Vietnam War movement was growing; there were riots in black communities across the country and the Civil Rights movement was transforming American consciousness. Within some segments of the white community there were both respect for the struggle for equality and the desire to embrace black society by opening the doors of the "establishment" to black citizens. Within the black community, racial discrimination, unemployment, crime, poverty, and police brutality remained; frustration with the political process was rising.

Having witnessed and participated in sit-ins, hunger strikes, selective-buying campaigns, boycotts, and freedom marches in the South, blacks knew that they had to take matters into their own hands in order to effect any meaningful change in the status quo. Anger was evident; a new militancy akin to Southern slave rebellions and the Garveyites in the twenties emerged. Groups like the Congress of Racial Equality proposed change through legal means; the Black Panthers advocated violence, if necessary, to achieve their objectives; and the black Muslims' message of economic self-sufficiency attracted supporters.

Although it was courageous for the Met to announce an exhibition on Harlem, it was not inappropriate. Nor was it outrageous for The Henry Luce Foundation, another bastion of conservatism, to provide $250,000 to produce it. The museum's press release dated November 16, 1967, stated:

> At no time in this country's history has there been a more urgent need for a creative confrontation between white and black communities than today. In the belief that The Metropolitan Museum of Art has a deep responsibility to help provide the opportunity for such an exchange, an exhibition of Harlem's rich and varied sixty-year history as the cultural capital of black America will be shown in the Museum's major exhibition galleries. In announcing the exhibition . . . at a press conference with the Honorable John V. Lindsay, Mayor of the City of New York, [and] Percy E. Sutton, President of the Borough of Manhattan, Thomas P. F. Hoving, Director of The Metropolitan Museum said, "The role of the Museum has always been to make people see with their eyes. Today we must ask people to look searchingly at things that have to be looked into—such as our communities and our environment . . . And hopefully it will generate a continuing situation in which white and black people can confront each other with more respect for each other's roles in American life.
>
> "There is no difference between this show and one of Rembrandt or Degas," continued Mr. Hoving. "Through their works, these artists reveal their individual worlds to us. The Harlem community becomes the artist in this case, the canvas the total environment in which Harlem's history was formed."

Reaching out to the black community was entirely new and unfamiliar for white cultural institutions. They had plenty of experience excluding blacks, but not many ground rules for inclusion. There were black janitors at the Met, but no black administrators or curators.

My experiences with blacks had been limited and remote. As Visual Arts Program Director of the New

York State Council on the Arts and as exhibition coordinator, I wanted members of the Harlem community to serve as advisers. But my approach turned out to be more of the window dressing about which complaints were so often heard. With the guidance of Jean Blackwell Hutson, curator of the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, I assembled a three-person research advisory committee consisting of herself, Regina Andrews, a board member of the National Urban League and associate of many Harlem Renaissance figures, and John Henrik Clark, a left-leaning polemicist who was then director of the Haryou-Act Heritage Program. Although advisors, they were never engaged in the direct planning and production of the exhibition or book.

From my perspective as a museum professional, it seemed to make more sense to have active black participation from the core exhibition staff. Of the seven-member staff, three were blacks. Don Harper, an electrical engineer from Chicago who had worked with photographer Bruce Davidson and had made documentary sound recordings of the Civil Rights movement in the South, was associate research and media director. A'lelia Nelson, a respected member of the Manhattan black community, was community research coordinator. Reggie McGhee, a photojournalist from Milwaukee, was director of photographic research.

It was Reggie who discovered James VanDerZee's incredible archive. Although known to a few jazz writers as a source of inexpensive photos, VanDerZee was hardly appreciated outside Harlem. I will never forget the day in December 1967 that an excited Reggie came into my office with a report of his first visit to VanDerZee's studio at 272 Lenox Avenue. "You won't believe what I found," he said. "A master with thousands of glass-plate negatives of every major figure in Harlem: Father Divine, Marcus Garvey, Daddy Grace, Joe Louis, Florence Mills, and Bill Robinson!" VanDerZee had set up his studio in 1908. Over the next sixty years he photographed virtually every major politician, musician, entertainer, minister, and hundreds of ordinary people to create one of the most astonishing photographic records of any community.

Although not an official member of the staff, Mel Patrick, community board coordinator for Borough President Percy Sutton, was a valued adviser. At Mel's recommendation, prior to inviting members of the black community to a reception at the Met, a party was given at A'lelia Nelson's house on Martha's Vineyard, where we sought the endorsement of the "black bourgeoisie." Here we formed the nucleus of our thirty-four member Community Advisory Committee, which included Katherine Aldridge of the *Amsterdam News,* actor Robert Hooks, singer and educator Dorothy Maynor, Judge Constance Baker Motley, State Senator Basil Paterson, Assemblyman Charles Rangel, and Reverend Wyatt T. Walker. Although we had several meetings with members of this committee and they often suggested subjects or individuals not to be overlooked, we never involved them in anything that could be described as a fundamental policy decision.

In a time of outspoken demands for "black power," as a white male directing the exhibition and editing the book, I was certainly aware that I was doing what was then considered a "black man's thing." With two recent successes, *The Lower East Side* show and an exhibition for the New York State Council on the Arts (aboard a canal boat that toured upstate New York communities) commemorating the 150th anniversary of the start of construction of the Erie Canal, where Irish and Italian immigrants played significant roles as the laborers who constructed the canals, I considered myself to be an effective interpreter of American ethnic culture. Like an actor who can project himself or herself into the personality of the character he or she portrays, I honestly believed that I could identify with the American black culture I was depicting. For a very short period of my life, I believed that I could see things from a black perspective and believed that I was tuned in to values that were important to blacks.

With several advisory groups, the exhibition staff operated from three different offices. The New York State Council on the Arts Visual Arts Program office, where I worked, was in midtown. We had an office opposite the Met at 1001 Fifth Avenue, where Louise Broecker managed production. To maintain contact with the Harlem community, we had an office in the

Schomburg Center on 135th Street. A'lelia Nelson, Don Harper, and Reggie McGhee worked from that office.

Romare Bearden and Norman Lewis, two respected Harlem-based artists, met with me in 1968 to express their dissatisfaction with the conception of the exhibition. They said that if the Met wanted to open its doors to Harlem, black artists should show there. I defended my conception of the exhibition as a documentary exhibition without original works of art, but expressed my understanding of their concern. I conveyed their message to Tom Hoving and recommended that there should be an exhibition by black artists in another part of the museum at the time of our exhibition. He began to investigate possibilities for having such an exhibition of Harlem artists. James Sneed, a black curator, was given responsibility for organizing the exhibition. Ultimately, he was unable to satisfy both the Met and the Harlem artists. The show never took place. This failure demonstrated the Met's lack of commitment to that request. The exhibition's cancellation left in its wake a sense of distrust on the part of the artists in Harlem who should have been our logical allies.

Resentment in general against white artists, intellectuals, and writers dealing with black subjects was increasing. Although white photographers had taken thousands of photographs in Harlem throughout the 1960s, many of which appeared in the exhibition and this book, they were no longer welcome to roam the streets of Harlem with their cameras. From a white perspective, Harlem was becoming a hostile and difficult place.

When Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated in Memphis in April 1968, black anger again erupted across the country; riots ripped apart every major American city with a sizable black population. Areas of Detroit, Newark, and Washington were devastated. Widespread violence occurred in Harlem and Brooklyn's Bedford-Stuyvesant. The unfulfilled goals of the Civil Rights movement led to frustration. Martin Luther King Jr.'s death fueled a new resistance to white promises of change, and led the black community to take the initiative and exercise power on behalf of its own objectives. "Black power" was evident across the country, from street corners to college campuses.

This combative mood made itself evident in New York in the fall of 1968 when the issue of community control of public schools erupted in the Ocean Hill-Brownsville section of Brooklyn. The stage for confrontation had been set in June 1968 when Governor Nelson Rockefeller signed a bill authorizing school decentralization for New York City. He said that while "it may not be satisfactory to all persons concerned, it sets a framework for proper action before the end of the 1968–69 school year." In an attempt to enhance his liberal image as a Republican presidential contender, Rockefeller lit the fuse for what was to become one of the most bitter and most racially charged labor disputes in New York City's history.

In August, Albert Shanker, president of the United Federation of Teachers, said that the Board of Education's tentative plan for decentralization violated the collective bargaining agreement between the teachers and the school system; he threatened a teachers' strike. Meanwhile the Board of Education proceeded with decentralization plans creating thirty-three community units with authority over the operation of their districts. In September, the union demanded that the Ocean Hill-Brownsville Demonstration School District in Brooklyn reinstate ten teachers dismissed by the local board. The union, which represented 55,000 of the city's 60,000 teachers, voted overwhelmingly to walk out.

Although there was a lot of posturing on all sides, the issue under contention was clear. A large percentage of the teachers were Jewish and an equally large percentage of the students were black. Black parents wanted to have black teachers for their children. Day by day, week by week, the strike continued. Bitterness increased on all sides. Nearly one million public-school students were without classes. In defiance of the strike, some parents and teachers created "free schools."

Responding to the escalating hostility between blacks and Jews, leaders of both communities established dialogues in which black anti-Semitism and Jewish racism were examined. They found that a number of issues had exacerbated tensions. Jews and blacks had joined forces in the Civil Rights movement. As black militants

moved to take control of their own movement, they excluded whites, including many liberal Jews. On a neighborhood level, blacks were moving in to what had once been Jewish neighborhoods. Increasing numbers of blacks were joining professions like teaching and social work, where Jews had been dominant. Black militants were joining the Muslim faith, carrying with it antagonism between Jews and Arabs. Another irritant was Jewish shopkeepers in black neighborhoods. The American Jewish Congress conducted a survey of a ten-block area in central Harlem and found that fifty percent of the stores were owned by blacks and thirty percent by Jews. When the teachers' strike was finally settled at the end of the year, bitterness gripped the entire city.

Announced in the previous year, *Harlem On My Mind* had been one of Tom Hoving's favorite projects. As a museum innovator, he saw the exhibition's potential for influencing museums around the world. The exhibition could be a vehicle for building a public image that might have lead to horizons beyond the museum world. When the teachers' strike deepened, he became more distant and less enthusiastic about the exhibition. He seemed to view it more as a burden than a delight. Having been a member of the Lindsay administration, he obviously had a better sense of the political climate than I did. Perhaps he anticipated trouble?

On November 23, 1968, the *New York Times* reported "Harlem Cultural Council Drops Support for Metropolitan Show." Edward Taylor, the council's executive director, cited a "breakdown in communications" between itself and the Metropolitan, stating further that "they haven't really begun to consult us. We're expected simply to be rubber stamps and window dressing." In our attempts to involve the community, Ed Taylor's organization appeared to be a likely collaborator; therefore, we made him a member of the exhibition's executive Community Advisory Committee. When Ed Taylor demanded a position as director of the exhibition, I refused, igniting his anger.

Although Ed Taylor was correct in saying that we used members of the Harlem community as "rubber stamps and window dressing," this was not our original intention. Given the mood of the times, community participation was a genuine objective; implementing it was another matter. No one in the museum profession knew anything about community participation. With limited experience working in black communities, I was not qualified to identify black leaders. Therefore, I relied on the black members of the staff to obtain advice from the black community. Dissension emerged, particularly when Jean Hutson and John Henrik Clark, members of the research advisory committee, complained that the three committee members, who had lived in Harlem for over 30 years, were being ignored while two black out-of-towners, Reggie McGhee and Don Harper, were being consulted.

When the Harlem Cultural Council story broke, I had a conversation with Martha Wallace, executive director of The Henry Luce Foundation, an experienced Time-Lifer. She said, "We're in trouble. This story dictates how the exhibition will be represented by the media from this point." As we had plenty of information to rebut Ed Taylor and excuses for Jean Hutson and John Henrik Clark's criticisms, I thought that we would be given our inning to respond. That never happened. It was the end of November and we had two more months in which to finish the exhibition, so community relations took a back seat while completing the exhibition was a priority.

Looking back, I realize that as much as I wanted to create an exhibition about Harlem, I wanted to demonstrate new ideas about how museums could become information environments that inundated people with images and sounds rather than artifacts. The era of museums as places for silent contemplation of works of art had ended. In my foreword to the catalogue, I wrote that our world had been transformed by communications; therefore I conceived the *Harlem On My Mind* exhibition as an environment that would parallel the sensations we experience in our own lives—a deluge of information stimuli.

We were given fifteen huge galleries—18,000 square feet—on the second floor. With exhibition designer Robert Malone and graphic designer Martin Moskof, the exhibition was a meticulously planned 60-minute experience. Using theories of fluid dynamics, we calculated the total number of people that could be accommodat-

ed in the space back-to-back, and came up with a capacity of four thousand people per hour. Our calculations were correct; at its peak, attendance approximated this figure. We assigned a time factor to each gallery and planned the information presented there within those limits. We had at least a hundred projectors, amplifiers, speakers, tape decks, and video monitors. Every space had a sound track. There were 700 photographic enlargements, ranging in size from 11 x 14 inches to 18 x 50 feet with explanatory text panels and another 500 projected images.

Decade by decade Harlem's history unfolded. At the entrance of each section, there was a slide projection summarizing Harlem and black history. People stood, watched, and moved on. Blacks had been in New York since 1624. The first gallery offered a panorama from slavery through emancipation to the beginning of the twentieth century, when approximately 60,000 blacks lived in the city. The next two galleries depicted Harlem's transformation from a white to a black community. Built as a fashionable white middle-class residential area with some tenements for working-class Jews and Italians, many of the buildings constructed at this time still remain in Central Harlem. Suspended in the middle of one gallery were banks of video monitors showing an interview with "Mother Brown," a legendary 106-year-old former slave who had lived in Harlem since 1907 and recalled the influx of Southern blacks into Harlem. The 1920s required three galleries for the Harlem Renaissance, politics, work, business, religion, families, social clubs, schools, music, and legendary Harlemites like Dr. W. E. B. Dubois, James Weldon Johnson, Langston Hughes, and Florence Mills. Standing in front of huge photos of Marcus Garvey and members of his Universal Negro Improvement Association, you could hear Garvey's voice.

It was here that James VanDerZee's genius shone. We made blow-ups from his sharp glass plate negatives. One was an enlargement fifty feet long and eighteen feet high of the 1925 Sunday school graduating class of the Abyssinian Baptist Church, with Reverend Adam Clayton Powell Sr. officiating. The largest space was a simulated nightclub with eight projectors throwing two hundred images of bands, performers, clubs, and record labels on screens suspended from its thirty-foot ceiling. There were potted palms, tables and chairs, and the sounds of 1920s jazz filling the room. We hoped people would dance; some did.

Moving from the gaiety and prosperity of the twenties to hard times in the thirties, we created a silent narrow corridor with the repeated image of a breadline. Walking through it, you felt like you were in a line surrounded by hungry people. In the next gallery, the bitter mood was conveyed by images of the unemployed, protests and strikes supplemented by text panels carrying quotations like this one from Billie Holliday:

> We lived on 145th Street near Seventh Avenue. One day we were so hungry we could barely breathe. I started out the door. It was cold as all-hell and I walked from 145th Street to 133rd down Seventh Avenue, going into every joint trying to find work.

Another from Adam Clayton Powell Jr.:

> The slave market still exists. Here (Prospect Avenue and 181st Street or Southern Boulevard and Weschester Avenue in the Bronx) lined along the walls each morning can be found, dejected, tattered, young and old Negro women . . . begging to be employed. Garrulous, mercenary females haggle with them over the price (15 cents) per hour.

There was this quote from the *Report of the Mayor's Commission to Investigate 1935 Harlem Riot:*

> Discrimination against Negro workers on the part of private enterprise is shown either in the restriction of the Negro to certain menial jobs or in his total exclusion from all types of occupations.

We also showed life among Harlem's middle class on "Sugar Hill" as well as photographs of celebrities such as Joe Louis, Father Divine, and Bill "Bojangles" Robinson.

To reflect the mood of the forties, where agitation, not solemnity, was evident, we designed the space with a series of large hanging structures carrying huge photos and more text statements. Rather than look at images on walls, you had to weave your way through congested space. Huge blow-ups of Gordon Parks's and Helen Levitt's photographs dominated. A. Philip Randolph's statement evoked what we wanted to convey:

> Negroes made the blunder of closing ranks and forgetting their grievances in the last war. We are resolved that we shall not make the same blunder again . . . If the Presi-

dent wants us to stop our agitation, then let him stop discrimination.

Photographs of the "March on Washington" movement and the 1943 riots illustrated two different manifestations of black frustration, one attempting to reform the system, the other combating it.

For the fifties, we changed the spatial configuration again and created one long billboard in the center of the gallery, with plastered photographs and text statements on both sides. The Muslims, the rise of Malcolm X, and the presence of Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. were contrasted. There was the hint of more militancy to come.

For the sixties, we made a contemporary room that pulsated with the energy found on the streets of Harlem. No more than twenty feet wide and sixty feet long, the walls were covered with nine ten-foot mylar screens, one devoted to each year of the decade. Life-size images flashed on both sides, loud black pop music engulfed the space. It was not a disco, but a new type of museum experience where information, not art, dominated.

Because I never saw the exhibition as a one-way street, I wanted to build dialogue into it. I wanted to have video cameras in the galleries and in the heart of Harlem, on the corner of Seventh Avenue and 125th Street, so that people in both places could talk to each other. Although the exhibition was happening at 82nd and Fifth Avenue, only thirty blocks south of Harlem, the museum was a formidable and distant place. If the museum appeared on the streets of Harlem, that would have demolished a barrier that might have kept many people from coming. Though it would have worked technically, to make it happen, we needed additional funding. We never succeeded in finding the money.

After a sixty-minute barrage of images, text, and sound, the last room—a hall of heroes—was for contemplation. Huge portraits of well-known and not-so-well-known African-Americans from all decades covered the walls, serving as an evocative summary of the content of the other fourteen galleries. On exiting, you went directly into galleries with Greek antiquities. I was pleased because this demonstrated that Harlem was a major culture like others displayed in the museum. A'lelia Nelson, Don Harper, and Reggie McGhee had final approval of everything that went into the exhibition. When interviewed by *New York* magazine just before the exhibition opened, Don said:

> I couldn't have worked on this show if I had to compromise . . . I wanted a part in making the show the way it ought to be. It is about a very modern people—black people in this country are only several hundred years old as a cultural entity . . . I want to be sure it doesn't turn out to be a begging show that relives how black people have been downtrodden. This show is going to say that ours has been a decidedly rich and productive culture. Even when bogged down in completely technical problems, I've tried to keep imagining what I'd be impressed by if I was a Harlem kid coming through the galleries; how he'd relate to what's happening; how to show him why black people have taken as much as they've taken. He should know that we haven't been just a bunch of Uncle Tom's for the last century.

In the same article, Reggie McGhee said:

> Through this show . . . I want to take ghetto kids and orient them to thinking toward professionalism. I want to teach them how to take a camera and go out in the streets and record their neighborhoods in a meaningful way. I was talking to a group of kids in Harlem the other day, and they were saying, "Hey man, that Stokely is really militant . . . that Huey Newton is really militant." I said to them, "Listen, anybody can rig up a firebomb and toss it; that's not militancy. Militancy is getting at the white power structure with your talent, which you can do today."

In November, Martha Wallace's prediction that the *Times* article that had reported Ed Taylor, Jean Hutson, and John Henrik Clark's dissatisfaction would set the tone by which the media would perceive the exhibition proved to be true. Seen as troubled, *Harlem On My Mind* was fair game for anyone and everyone to attack. The Sunday before the exhibition opened, the *Times*' chief art critic, John Canaday, devoted his entire column to condemning the exhibition because "it includes no art." He said further, "I cannot see that an art critic has any business reviewing . . . the exhibition unless he is also sure of himself as a sociologist, which leaves me out." Two weeks later, another *Times* art critic, Hilton Kramer, repeated Canaday's lament, saying that the exhibition "hardly seems a proper subject for criticism," going on to devote the rest of his piece to a blistering personal attack on Tom Hoving for "politicalizing the Metropolitan Museum." He said, "No

doubt in the future Mr. Hoving will learn to improve upon the kind of audio-visual entertainment he has currently mounted in the name of 'relevance.'" This tone of criticism was echoed over and over again because the Harlem exhibition threatened an exclusive world that these critics and others like them wanted to preserve.

In an interview with another *Times* critic, Grace Glueck, I arrogantly said, "I think that this whole thing should be evaluated in terms of whether people really like the show. If it stinks, let them crucify us. If the performance is good, I'd like to be there with the rest of the team getting bunches of roses."

On the night of the press preview, a group of fifteen black and white demonstrators led by Benny Andrews, an artist, Henri Ghent, director of The Brooklyn Museum's community gallery, and Ed Taylor of the Harlem Cultural Council, said that the exhibition had been organized "by whites who do not begin to know the black experience," and complained that black artists had not been represented. On opening day, William Booth, the black chairman of the city's Human Rights Commission, toured the exhibition. He said, "We have had complaints that the show was one-sided. From what I've seen here today, I can't see the validity of that complaint. Both the up and the down of Harlem are in this exhibit. From my point of view it shows both the good and the bad. It is a rounded view." Commissioner Booth commented that about 15 percent of those at the show were black, about six or seven times the average number of blacks who ordinarily went to the Met. Crowds swelled, protests continued, and the media had a heyday.

Two days before the exhibition was scheduled to open to the public, ten paintings in the Met's galleries, one of them a Rembrandt, were defaced. The paintings had relatively small and easily removed *H*s scratched into their varnish surfaces. It was questionable what the *H*s meant—Harlem or Hoving? It was never determined who had done it or why. The damage to the paintings made me sick. Having been trained as an art historian and museum curator, I had learned to preserve works of art, not destroy them. It was later determined that the paintings could be restored and the damage eliminated.

Given the full treatment of a major museum exhibition, there was a black-tie opening, but it was not like any other opening at the Met. There was a large crowd of demonstrators, mostly black artists protesting their exclusion, yelling at the arriving invitees, many of whom were black. Mayor Lindsay spoke, praising the museum and lauding the exhibition.

The next day, without any reference to his remarks of the evening before, Mayor Lindsay charged that the introduction to the catalogue was "racist" and that it should be withdrawn. His characterization of this book left an indelible mark which, until this day, is often repeated. In her introduction, which she wrote as a term paper when she was a seventeen-year-old student at Theodore Roosevelt High School in the Bronx, Candice Van Ellison said:

> Anti-Jewish feeling is a natural result of the black Northern migration. Afro-Americans in Northeastern industrial cities are constantly coming in contact with Jews. Pouring into lower-income areas in the city, the Afro-American pushes out the Jew. Behind every hurdle that the Afro-American has yet to jump stands the Jew who has already cleared it . . . Thus, our contempt for the Jew makes us feel more completely American in sharing a national prejudice.

Why and how did a young black woman's high school term paper become this book's introduction? In March 1967, when I first proposed the Harlem book to my editor, Arthur Cohen of Holt, Rinehart and Winston, he suggested that the introduction be written by someone like sociologist Kenneth Clark or novelist Ralph Ellison. I never liked that idea because they represented an older generation who were already expressing themselves. I wanted to find a younger person who had something fresh to say. As whites began to open up to blacks, they wanted to discover black talent. Candy Van Ellison came to the New York State Council on the Arts as a member of our Ghetto Arts Corps. Assigned to work with me, she brought her high school term paper for me to read. I decided that it was just the kind of introduction I wanted from someone who was young, black, and talented. At about this time, Arthur Cohen decided not to do the book. In a letter to my agent, Lynn Nesbit, he said, "Moreover it is my feeling, in checking with some of my Negro friends their own reaction to the book as a concept, that

there is going to be one helluva lot of political hostility generated by the show and the book." Shortly after that, Lynn Nesbit arranged for me to see Jim Silberman, executive editor at Random House, who decided to publish it. Because I wanted the book to be accessible to as many people as possible, I arranged for the Met to buy 40,000 paperback copies to be sold as the exhibition catalogue at a retail price of $1.95, an unbelievable price for a 256-page paperback book. The hardcover book sold for $12.95.

Tom Hoving insisted on seeing and reading everything that went into the exhibition and the book. I remember the day that A'lelia, Don, Reggie, and I sat at the round table he used as a desk, listening to his reactions to Candy's introduction. He underlined the contentious phrases saying, "This really bothers me." I assured him that anyone who had association with the Civil Rights movement had been exposed to black anti-Semitism. Since he raised the issue, we decided to discuss it as a staff. A'lelia, Don, Reggie, and I met in our office at the Schomburg, read it, talked about it. At this time, Jean Hutson was still functioning as an adviser, so we consulted her. She said that Candy's statement reflected a pattern of tensions arising between succeeding waves of ethnic groups that was characteristic of New York. When the Jews arrived, the school teachers were Irish. Now, the Jews were teachers and blacks were students. Reflecting on our collective experiences, we decided that what Candy had written was true and that it should stand. I informed Tom of our decision, and he was satisfied. Other people read everything in the book, including Jim Silberman, executive editor at Random House. Though he was Jewish, he didn't flag these statements.

From my own experience, what Candy wrote rang true. When Jean Hutson first introduced me to John Henrik Clark and we had lunch on 135th Street to discuss the exhibition, he told me of his experiences as a *shabbas goy* working for Lower East Side Jews on the Sabbath. He said, "If you're another downtown Jew who has come up here to rip us off, go away." Although there was no apparent hostility in his remarks, every time we had a staff meeting Don Harper would say, "Just like the Cotton Club, black talent and a Jewish boss." I assumed that in presenting facts, as I and my advisers experienced them, we were doing the right thing. This included expressing a form of collective resentment prevalent in Harlem. Little did I know how few would share our opinion. If naïveté can be a valid excuse, it's the only one I can offer. Having experienced it myself and having read about it frequently in the then-current newspaper articles related to the school strike, I assumed that everyone knew that black anti-Semitism existed. Unfortunately, I was completely wrong. Malcolm X had made statements critical of Jews in his autobiography, but that was completely different from a book published under the aegis of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, a major New York City institution.

From then on, we operated with a siege mentality. Although there were two separate issues, the exhibition and the catalogue, they merged in the general public's perception. There were black artists picketing to protest the absence of black art, and there were Jewish Defense League pickets protesting the catalogue. Black and Jewish protesters with different issues were in front of the museum, in the newspapers, and on radio and TV. The Jewish Defense League even picketed outside my family's apartment building.

There was no consensus; there were people who supported the exhibition and others who condemned the book. Reverend Adam Clayton Powell Jr. praised the exhibit in a sermon before his congregation at the Abyssinian Baptist Church and Reverend Henry Dudley Rucker, pastor of the New White Rock Baptist Church, condemned it, reading a statement on the front steps of the museum. Mrs. Ida Cullen Cooper, widow of Harlem Renaissance poet Countee Cullen, said, "The exhibit will also help people realize the strengths, the desires and accomplishments that the black people have made and attained, even through the worst kind of trauma and denial of their dignity and just rights." The venerable Meyer Schapiro, art historian and professor at Columbia University, said that it was a mistake for the museum to have sponsored the exhibition and that it would have been better to "have found a space for it in Harlem or in an armory elsewhere under Negro auspices, with the support of a committee of white friends, and

given Harlem the satisfaction of producing its own great show." Black archivist and historian M. A. (Spike) Harris said, "Any idiot can scrawl a sign and crawl around in reaction to what someone else dared to venture. Such 'critics' hold themselves up to contempt when they fail to meet a challenge. It is possible that sometime in the future *Harlem On My Mind* will be surpassed. When that happens, the fact cannot be obscured that the Metropolitan showed the way and set a standard for others to follow." Architect Hugh Hardy said, "The opening up of a great public institution to the larger community is both courageous and justified. It is precisely because this exhibition stands in the Metropolitan that it is effective. (What difference would 10,000 photographs of Negroes make if displayed in Grand Central?) Although one understands the public need for the illusion of stability and the 'permanent' values of art, the Black-White confrontation is too corrosive and too destructive to be ignored. I do not see how you could have accomplished your purpose without controversy, and even though disheartened by the narrowness of public reaction, I am delighted to see your great grey institution come awake."

It was a no-win situation. Bowing to pressure, Tom Hoving claimed full responsibility in an apologia to be inserted in every catalogue. Reluctantly, I acquiesced to his pressure to persuade Candice Van Ellison to write her own statement, which was also inserted in catalogues. The controversy continued. Every New York paper carried lead articles, every radio and TV station reported on it daily, every national magazine had its story, special interest magazines covered it; internationally it was picked up by *The Times* of London and *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*. As media exposure increased, everyone ran for cover. Bennett Cerf, publisher of Random House, said that he was "sorry about the Met catalogue" and that they would insert their own apology into the hardcover edition. Catalogues were flying out the door at the rate of a thousand a day. Attendance was breaking all records. In the first nine days, 72,793 people had seen *Harlem* in comparison with the previous high of 165,948 people in four weeks viewing the exhibition *The Great Age of Frescoes*.

Finally, after two weeks of unending pressure from the mayor, City Council, the media, and members of his board, Tom Hoving capitulated and withdrew the catalogue from sale. Although I knew that the fallout from the school strike had sapped his enthusiasm for the Harlem show, I felt, for the first time, that our relationship had soured. As the one person ultimately responsible for whatever went into the exhibition and catalogue, I never recanted, nor apologized. When I found out that he had withdrawn the catalogues from sale, I went to his office expressing my displeasure, calling him "a coward" for caving in to political pressure. Little did I know how excessive that pressure had been or what his board had decided. Although I had been warned by a friend that there was a move to force the New York City Council to withhold funds from the museum if the catalogue was not withdrawn from sale, I never thought it would happen. It did. Later I learned that Tom Hoving's job was on the line. The museum board was dismayed with what Harlem had brought to the museum.

Then the editor of *Park East,* an Upper East Side neighborhood paper, determined that the controversial statements in Candy Van Ellison's introduction were derived from Daniel Patrick Moynihan and Nathan Glazer's 1963 book, *Beyond the Melting Pot*. On page 77, Moynihan and Glazer wrote:

> Perhaps for many Negroes, subconsciously, a bit of anti-Jewish feeling helps them feel more completely American, a part of the majority group.

Here is what Candy wrote in her introduction:

> Another major area of contact involves the Jewish landlord and the Black tenant. A large portion of Harlem's Black women serve as domestics in middle-class Jewish homes. Perhaps this would explain the higher rate of anti-Semitism among Black women than men. Even the middle-class Harlem Black who has managed to work his way up the ladder in government jobs comes in contact with Jews who have already climbed the same ladder and now maintain higher government positions. One other important factor worth mentioning is that psychologically Blacks may find that anti-Jewish sentiments place them, for once, with a majority. Thus our contempt for the Jew makes us feel more completely American in sharing a national prejudice.

In her original high school term paper Candy used quotations taken

directly from *Beyond the Melting Pot*. I asked her to remove the quotes and suggested that she use her own words because I didn't want her introduction to sound like a high school term paper. Professor Glazer said that it was ironic that her introduction was attacked as anti-Semitic when it was derived from a book that clearly was not. He thought that Jews, for the first time in many years, were worried about anti-Semitism. With the Anti-Defamation League taking the lead, every major Jewish organization condemned the book.

What would have happened if I had not suggested that Candy remove the quotations and footnotes? Tom Hoving said that had he known of the footnoted references to Moynihan and Glazer, he doubts that the political heat would have been as intense. Recently, Tom Hoving told me that,

> If the blame for these statements could have been directed to two distinguished social historians instead of a defenseless young woman, we would never have caved and suppressed the catalogues. Chances are that, no matter how enraged Lindsay's people would have been or the members of the City Council, they would not have blasted Moynihan and Glazer. Had I learned that the quotation marks and footnotes had been removed before the withdrawal of the catalogues, I would have put that in a press release and fought back.

That my decision to remove the quotation marks and footnotes would provoke such controversy came as a complete surprise to me. There were other surprises. I expected support from artists and intellectuals who should have been able to appreciate the breakthroughs we made; there were very few such supporters. I expected the New York Police Department to be up in arms over the endless number of photographs showing police officers beating blacks. That never happened. But there was also the expected: given the highly charged climate in which the exhibition was presented, I expected hostility and criticism. That John Canaday and Hilton Kramer, echoing the concerns of a conservative art establishment, launched brutal salvos came as no surprise. *Harlem On My Mind* transgressed the sacrosanct domain of the cultural elite by opening up the Met (and consequently other museums around the world) to new subjects and modes of presentation. I expected criticism from black artists because they had been excluded.

The Met sold 14,000 copies of the catalogue and buried 26,000 in the basement. By the end of February, Random House had sold only 5,000 hardcover copies. Like the Met, they inserted a disclaimer in their books. Random House president Bob Bernstein was under pressure to remove the book from sale. After a meeting with other Random House executives where he and Jim Silberman were the only supporters of the book, he decided to continue to sell it. The Book-of-the-Month Club bought 5,000 copies, which they never offered to their members and dumped on remainder houses in New York City. I tried to find another publisher to buy the Met's 26,000 copies, but that didn't work out. Not sold, after several years, the Met's copies were distributed through black organizations.

How do I assess the impact of the exhibition and book? As an Upper West Side neighborhood paper, *Manhattan Tribune,* said, "Good Show, Bad Scene." That is exactly how I felt. I knew that the exhibition was incredible in terms of its presentation of black life. It had achieved my expectations—depicting African-Americans as major contributors to our society, creating awareness of the richness and diversity of their culture using photographs, sound, and video to convey these messages, and in the process making museums recognize that they must become more relevant parts of our lives. I was proud of what I had accomplished, but dismayed to find that so many people were trapped by their devotion to traditional values. I was equally proud of the book because it reflected the quality of the exhibition in its interpretation of black life in Harlem.

Harlem On My Mind never escapes me. It's the most important show I've curated. During the intervening years, I have created exhibitions and publications for the Anti-Defamation League. The final irony occurred several years ago when I was developing a project for them on the history of anti-Semitism in the United States. While doing research in their archives, I found a file called *Harlem On My Mind*. I never opened it.

ALLON SCHOENER
NEW YORK CITY
DECEMBER 1994