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Harlem just opened New York State's first civil rights museum, with 8 galleries spanning 500 years of history—and kids get in free

The National Urban League's new museum on 125th Street is New York State's first civil rights museum and the nation's first dedicated to the Northern civil rights movement.



Source / Urban Civil Rights Museum

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Staff Writer

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November 19, 2026

When most people think of the civil rights movement, they picture Selma, Montgomery and the American South.

A new museum in Harlem wants to widen that picture.

The **Urban Civil Rights Museum** opened on **Saturday, Nov. 14** at 117 West 125th Street.

It's **New York State's first civil rights museum** and the **nation's first dedicated to the Northern civil rights movement**.

"For too long, the story of civil rights in America has been told as a Southern story," said Marc H. Morial, president and CEO of the National Urban League, which created the museum.

theexcursiondoctor and **urbancivilrightsmuseu...**
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New York City Has It’s First Civil Rights Museum Located In Heart of Harlem opening 🏛️✨ @urbancivilrightsmuseum @naturbanleague

The brand new Urban Civil Rights Museum officially opens to the public permanently on November 14, 2026

📍 PLAN YOUR VISIT: 🏛️ WHERE: Urban Civil Rights Museum in Harlem | 117 W 125th St, 4th Floor, Harlem, NYC 🎟️ Adult Admission: $20 🎟️ Children 12 & under: FREE ⏰ Wed–Sat: 10 AM–5 PM | Sun: 12–5 PM 🚫 Closed Monday & Tuesday

I had the opportunity to get an exclusive first look inside and this is such a meaningful addition to NYC's cultural attractions!

🔹 Established by the National Urban League, the museum is dedicated to preserving and sharing the often-overlooked history of the Civil Rights Movement in Northern cities like New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, and Boston

🏛️ WHAT TO EXPECT INSIDE:
2,000 square feet of permanent and rotating exhibitions, the museum features immersive storytelling experiences, interactive displays, historical artifacts, and archival footage that bring American history to life!

- Explore Moving History Forward, a permanent exhibition covering centuries of Black American history, the Great Migration, and the Civil Rights Movement.
-Discover the history of the Harlem Renaissance and the influential individuals who helped shape American culture and the fight for equality.
-Listen to historical recordings, speeches, and firsthand accounts from influential civil rights leaders.
-Experience THRIVING! Harlem as Homeplace, an exhibition celebrating Harlem's cultural heritage and community.
-Look forward to guided tours, artist discussions, Harlem history talks, and community events throughout the year.

📌 SAVE this for your next NYC museum visit and SHARE it with someone who loves discovering new museums, Black history, and cultural experiences in New York City!
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#thingstodonyc #harlemnyc #nycmuseums #BlackHistory #artnyc

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500 years of history in 8 galleries

The permanent exhibition, **Moving History Forward**, spreads **more than four centuries** of Black history in Northern cities across eight galleries.

✨ Discover recommended experiences



Steps from the Rockefeller Center Christmas tree, St. Patrick's Cathedral's 360-degree light show is getting a Christmas edition, with carolers, a live choir and an orchestra

See tickets



In 1992, Juan Luis Guerra's Madison Square Garden show was cancelled for poor sales; 31 years later, the Knicks had to make room for him — and his bachata melodies return to NYC this December

See tickets

Executive director and chief curator Jennifer Scott called fitting 500 years into the space a "nice constraint to have".

Here's how the journey unfolds:

- **Freedom Square:** an immersive intro film, with Changemakers murals in the lobby
- **Roots of the Urban North (1500–1900):** the transatlantic slave trade, slavery in the North, the Underground Railroad and free Black settlements
- **The Great Migration (1900–1970):** the two waves that brought nearly **six million** Black Southerners North and West
- **The Harlem Renaissance (1920–1940):** cultural and political expression
- **Fighting for Justice (1940–1960):** the changing civil rights struggles of the mid-century
- **Finding Our Way (1970–present):** political empowerment and today's movements
- **Seat at the Table:** a resource gallery that asks what role you'll play



Source / Urban Civil Rights Museum

What to look for inside

Keep an eye out for these standouts:

- A **June 5, 1943 front page of the Amsterdam News**
- Wall displays honoring the Black press, including the **Pittsburgh Courier** and **Chicago Defender**, plus issues of the Urban League's journal *Opportunity*
- A projected map of **maroon communities** across the Caribbean and the Americas in 1797
- Protest banners and signs, and **vintage TVs replaying news footage**

Plus: an exhibition all about Harlem

The first rotating exhibition, **Thriving! Harlem as Homeplace**, is on view through **May 17, 2027**.

It focuses on Harlem's homes, neighborhood landmarks and the everyday residents who shaped it.

There's also a café and a gift shop on site.

A museum more than 100 years in the making

The National Urban League was founded in Harlem in 1910.

The idea for the museum came during the League's 2010 centennial, when a traveling mobile museum showed the need for a permanent home for this history.

The museum is the final piece of the Urban League Empowerment Center. The building also houses the League's headquarters, its Institute for Race, Equity, and Justice, and **170 affordable homes**.

The development was backed by nearly **$90 million** in public funding and tax credit equity.

Know before you go

- **Where:** 117 West 125th Street, 4th floor, Harlem
- **Hours:** Wednesday–Saturday, 10 am–5 pm; Sunday, noon–5 pm; closed Monday and Tuesday
- **Tickets:** timed-entry tickets online in advance; **$20** for adults ages 25–61, **free for kids 12 and under**
- **Heads up:** the museum is closed **Nov. 25–29** for Thanksgiving

See also: NYC's 'Chanukah on Ice' returns to Central Park with a giant ice menorah & unlimited seasonal treats

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