

**The Power of Student Potential:
Uncovering the History of Harlem Preparatory School, 1967-1974**
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Introduction

This brief introduction will introduce the Harlem Prep story, acknowledging previous books and efforts, and recognize the individuals who have kept Harlem Prep alive. This introduction will then outline my primary arguments through an overview of the three main themes of this dissertation: the school's community coalition, ideology and educational philosophy, and student lives.

Chapter One: A Need for a High School in Harlem

This chapter will provide historical context about schools and conditions in Harlem. Specifically, this chapter will analyze the secondary source materials (as well as a limited amount of primary sources) and explore why there was a crucial need for a high school in Harlem, in the context of educational turmoil in Harlem and in broader New York City. What were the conditions—the physical conditions of the neighborhood and the psychological state of parents and students—that allowed for an alternative school like Harlem Prep to emerge?

Chapter Two: The Founding of Harlem Prep, 1967-1968

This chapter explores the founding of Harlem Prep, with a thematic focus on the early development of the school's ideology and founding principles. Specifically, this chapter explains how Harlem Prep was born out of the New York Urban League led by Dr. Eugene Callendar, a local civil rights advocate, and part of the NYUL's "Street Academy" program. The Ford Foundation provided the initial grant for the "Street Academy" program, with the Carnegie Corporation then giving \$300,000 grant to start Harlem Prep. This chapter will also spend a significant amount of time on Headmaster Edward Carpenter's biography as well as an overview of Harlem Prep's first year at the Harlem Armory before breaking away from the NYUL and moving to its permanent location on 136th and 8th Avenue.

Chapter Three: The Rise of Harlem Prep, 1968-1971

This chapter describes the middle years of Harlem Prep's existence, with a thematic focus on the school's ideology and principles—where it fit within a Freedom School or Black Nationalist historiographical perspective, for example—as well as a focus on its students, such as their stories and lives. What kind of students attended the school and what impact did it have on them? In terms of advancing the narrative, this chapter will primarily describe the significant growth of the school in terms of students, staff, community outreach and curriculum; for example, information about what classes were offered, the pedagogy of its teachers, how the open-space classroom worked, and other information that flesh out how the school operated during these "prime" years, in the words of one former student.

Chapter Four: Building a Community Coalition, 1968-1971

The chapter also tackles these critical, growing years of Harlem Prep but with a thematic focus on community and community relations. In the words of an independent contractor who performed a study on the school: "What is the philosophy which holds together the unlikely mix of students,

staff, alumni, sponsors, fund raisers and other friends that constitute 'the Harlem Prep community'?"¹ This chapter attempts to this question of how Harlem Prep was able to build a coalition of supporters that crossed racial and ideological lines, and ranged from radical Black activists to white-owned national corporations. (Harlem Prep seemed to have two streams of support: local support in terms of school operations, and more elite support in terms of finances and outside advocacy.) In relation, this chapter will also explore what community meant to both Harlem Prep administrators, faculty, and students, and to those on the outside of the school.

Chapter Five: A Fight for Funding, A Fight for Education, 1971-1973

This chapter explains Harlem Prep's struggle to stay open and structural/educational changes as the 1970s progressed, with a shared thematic focus on both community relations and on students. As Harlem Prep financial pipelines closed, the school had to adjust in terms of the number of students it accepted and what community programs it offered, for example, and this chapter shines a particular light on the paper trail from Harlem Prep administrators to keep the school afloat (i.e., fundraisers and other efforts), including negotiations with the Board of Education. In turn, this chapter discusses the changing face of the Black freedom struggle—think, the turn toward nationalism—and how that may or may not have affected Harlem Prep's ability to fundraise.

Chapter Six: The Final Years, 1973-1974 and Beyond

This chapter explores the final year of Harlem Prep as an independent status (1973-1974), which was filled with stressful situations and ongoing negotiations with many public school administrators. Harlem Prep originally was not going to open in the fall of 1973 unless they had contingency plans on merging with the Board of Education, and once that agreement happened, was able to secure funding for one final semester. This attempts to explain the tension between Harlem Prep and the Board of Education, and why, ultimately, Harlem Prep—despite the acclaimed success from many people and institutions—had no choice but to merge. With a continued thematic focus on students and the community, this chapter then will then briefly discuss the immediate aftermath of what Harlem Prep was like under Board of Education control. Finally, with both a contemporary and historical lens of race, this chapter will close with a discussion on how Harlem Prep might have been “too successful,” according to many alumni.

Chapter Seven: Harlem Prep's Lasting Legacy (1974-1982)

This brief chapter discusses the roughly eight years that Harlem Prep existed as part of the Board of Education, including changing administrators, changing buildings, and eventual merging with Park East High School in 1982. This chapter will also recap student stories from 1967 to 1974—both their triumphs and struggles—in a closing discussion on Harlem Prep's lasting legacy. This may include some statistics or other anecdotes about what students did after graduating during the primary years discussed in this dissertation.

Epilogue: Learning from Harlem Prep Today

The dissertation will close with a discussion about Harlem Prep's potential to inspire educators to re-think education today, including notes about potential contemporary scholarship connections.

¹ John Hopkins, “Draft of MARC Assessment of Harlem Prep,” March 19, 1970, Ford Foundation Records, Microfilm Reel 1781, Folder Harlem Preparatory School (FA732D), Rockefeller Archive Center.