

SNIPERS FIRE ON POLICE FROM HARLEM ROOFTOP



Caucus O. K. Put on Bill to Insure Jobs

Democratic in Assembly Pledged as Lehman Acts - Vote 14-9

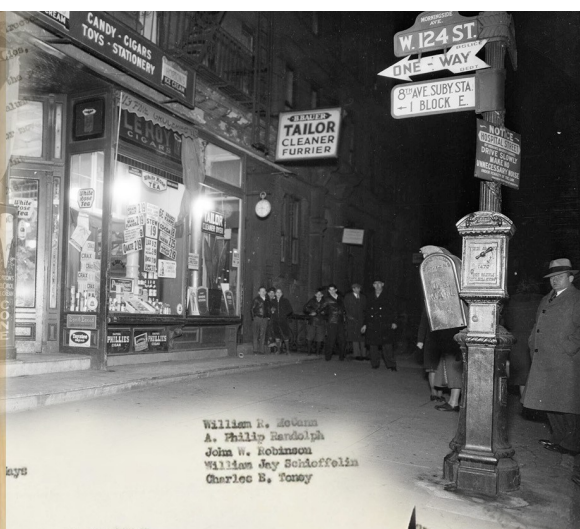
By MICHAEL W. ...

MAYOR WITHHOLDS REPORT ON CAUSE OF HARLEM RIOT

Received Final Findings of His Committee Thursday — Hospital Overcrowded

DISCRIMINATION DECLARED FACTOR IN NEGRO UNREST

Mayor LaGuardia has had final report of the committee pointed to investigate conditions underlying the Harlem riot of 1935, in his possession today, it was disclosed. He was reported to have withheld it until he had time to study it.



William R. Johnson
A. Philip Randolph
John H. Robinson
William Jay Schloffer
Charles B. Tansy

DISCRIMINATION IN EMPLOYMENT

Richard F. Delany, Chairman
Morris Ernst
Francis Houston Barber
John G. Grinley

DEATH AND HOSPITALIZATION

John G. Grinley, Chairman
Charles H. Roberts

PHILIP RANDOLPH

Philip Randolph, Chairman
William R. Johnson
Charles H. Roberts

Postal Telegraph
THE INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM

Commercial Cable
Machan

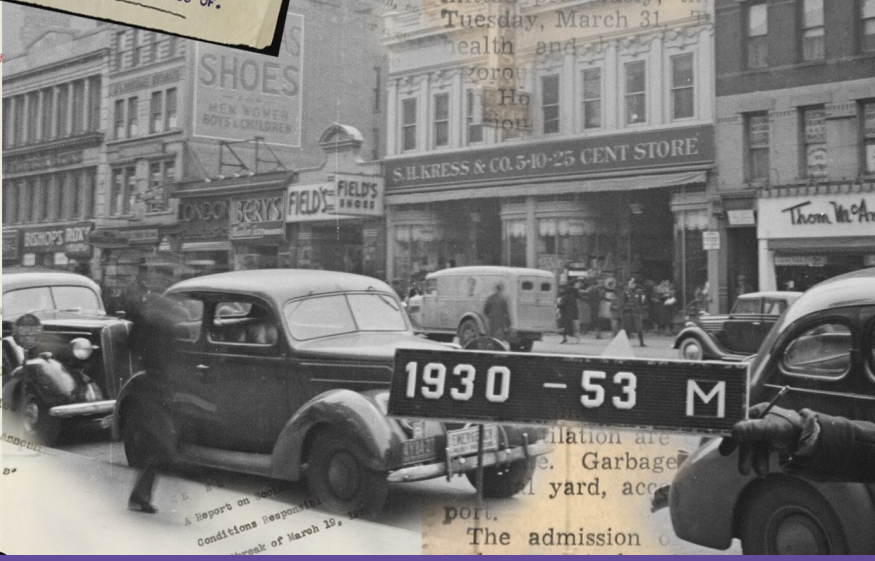
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BY 20 1227P

CITY HALL NEWYORKCITY

ASSOCIATION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF COLORED PEOPLE URGES YOU TO PERMIT THOROUGH AND IMPARTIAL INVESTIGATION OF RIOTING IN HARLEM LAST NIGHT STOP COMMITTEE SHOULD AS WELL AS IMMEDIATE CAUSES OF TROUBLE WITH RIGHT ASSES AND ALL PERTINENT RECORDS STOP WE SUGGEST MEN WITH DUE REGARD FOR FACT THAT LAST NIGHTS TROUBLE ARE ROOTED IN ECONOMIC DISTRESS OF

Working with housing, public assistance, and social welfare. Commission on the point of view of the Commissioner of Taxes and Finance to analyze the employment of public officials, with a little intelligence. Attorney, did



FRANCE SEES 'THREAT OF WAR'

NEW YORK JOURNAL

1 DIES, 9 DYING IN HARLEM RIOT

WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO ABOUT IT, MR. MAYOR?

WAR THREAT: GERMANS CALM WHILE EUROPE SEETHES

Body of Man Shot Found in Car in Front of Anti-Vice Quarters

EXHIBITION BASEBALL GAMES

RACING RESULTS

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ABOUT US

The mission of the NYC Department of Records and Information Services (DORIS) is to foster civic life by preserving and providing public access to historical and contemporary records and information about New York City government. The agency ensures that City records are properly maintained following professional archival and record management practices. Materials are available to diverse communities, both online and in person. For more information about how DORIS can work with your school, please contact us via email: education@records.nyc.gov or visit our [website](#). Follow us on social media!



Contributors: Kimi Adler, Nate Blower, Olivia Chan, Karen Dahl, Jenna Hinckley, Devaun Longley, Eva Nivard, Khalid Shakhshir, Alexa Spieler, and Olivia Willms.

OVERVIEW

One day in 1935, Lino Rivera, a Black Puerto Rican teenager, entered Kress's variety store on 125th Street in Harlem and attempted to take a pen knife from the counter. Before the sixteen-year-old could leave, the store manager stopped him. Though Rivera was briefly detained by police, the store owner did not press charges, and no arrests were made.

However, a false rumor quickly spread that Rivera had been beaten to death in the store's basement. Within hours, what had seemed like a minor incident ignited deep-seated frustration in Harlem. Decades of racial discrimination, economic hardship, and police aggression boiled over as thousands took to the streets. The unrest lasted through the night and into the next day, leaving widespread property damage, 125 arrests, numerous injuries, and three fatalities—all of whom were Black.

In the aftermath, labor unions condemned the riots, while the secretary of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) called on Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia to investigate the root causes of the violence. In response, LaGuardia appointed a commission composed of high-profile New Yorkers, including poet, playwright and novelist Countee Cullen, Arthur Garfield Hays, founding member and general counsel of the American Civil Liberties Union, and A. Phillip Randolph, labor leader and head of the International Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, among other notables. The Commission members elicited testimony at 21 very interactive hearings and reported on six key areas: crime and the police, discrimination in employment, hospitals and health, education, and housing.

The Commission's final report was unambiguous: while the false rumor acted as the spark, the deeper causes lay in systemic racial inequities. The report concluded that the "economic and social ills of Harlem which are deeply rooted in the very nature of our economic and social system," could not be rapidly corrected. "Yet the Commission is convinced that, if the

administration machinery set itself to prevent racial discrimination ... the people of Harlem would at least not feel that their economic and social ills were form[s] of racial persecution.”

Faced with these politically uncomfortable conclusions, the 118-page report was never officially released but was published in full at the time by the *New York Amsterdam News*, one of the nation’s oldest Black-owned newspapers. The report was later filed with Mayor LaGuardia’s papers which are now housed in the Municipal Archives.

With this curriculum aid, we invite you to explore how the Mayor’s Commission on Conditions in Harlem and related primary sources reflect the lasting impact of racial discrimination in Harlem, New York City, and beyond.

TEACHER'S GUIDE

To support exploration of the 1936 Commission's report and related historical and contemporary resources, as well as facilitate conversations around its themes, the New York City Department of Records and Information Services (DORIS) developed a dedicated website. The site features unique materials from the collections of the Municipal Archives and Library alongside contemporary comparative data.

In addition, as part of a collaboration with the McSilver Institute for Poverty Policy and Research at New York University, the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Vital City, New York City Speaks, and the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Strategic Initiatives, DORIS co-hosted a conference examining the Commission's recommendations and observations. The conference also considered present-day data gathered from more than 62,000 New Yorkers by NYC Speaks and explored the implications of these findings for current City government.

The report — produced by a commission appointed by Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia — examined the causes and aftermath of the 1935 Harlem Riot and the Harlem community more broadly. It offers students historical insight while presenting the facts, context, and language of the period, helping to situate students in 1935 Harlem. Supplemental sources, including photographs, illustrations, audiovisual clips, and news articles, further illuminate this pivotal moment in New York City history.

Like the report itself, the [website](#) and this curriculum aid are organized into sections addressing key issues Harlem residents faced in 1935: justice, education, housing, and employment/relief. Each section includes guiding questions designed to encourage critical thinking about the Commission's findings and their relevance today.

Students and educators can familiarize themselves with the structure of the website and the range of available resources provided, including recordings of the 2022 conference, by exploring the Internal Links section of this aid (page 7).

Please note that students may encounter historical texts containing language or descriptions that are offensive by contemporary standards. Teachers are encouraged to review these sections in advance to determine how best to present and contextualize them for their students.

STANDARDS

Civics for All Grade 8

<https://www.weteachnyc.org/resources/resource/civics-all-6-8-part-1/>

Civics for All – Grades 9–12

<https://www.weteachnyc.org/resources/resource/civics-all-9-12-part-2/>

KEY WORDS AND PHRASES

Commission – A group of people officially appointed to investigate an issue, gather information, and make recommendations.

Decrepit – Worn out or in very poor condition because of age, neglect, or lack of maintenance.

Dilapidated – Falling apart or badly damaged due to neglect or disrepair.

Dire – Extremely serious or urgent.

Great Depression – A severe worldwide economic crisis that lasted from 1929 through much of the 1930s, marked by widespread unemployment, poverty, and financial instability.

Harlem Renaissance – A cultural, artistic, and intellectual movement during the 1920s and 1930s centered in Harlem, where Black writers, artists, musicians, and thinkers celebrated Black life and identity.

Incite – To encourage or stir up strong emotions or actions, sometimes leading to conflict or unrest.

Jim Crow – Laws and practices, mainly in the United States from the late 1800s through the mid-1900s, that enforced racial segregation and discrimination against Black people.

Relief – Government assistance provided to people experiencing poverty or hardship, especially during times of economic crisis.

INTERNAL LINKS

Website

Homepage:	https://harlemconditions.cityofnewyork.us/
Original Report:	https://harlemconditions.cityofnewyork.us/elementor-830/
Introduction	https://harlemconditions.cityofnewyork.us/introduction/
Gallery	https://harlemconditions.cityofnewyork.us/gallery/
Resources	https://harlemconditions.cityofnewyork.us/more/
Letters to the Commission	https://harlemconditions.cityofnewyork.us/hearing-transcript/
Infographics	https://harlemconditions.cityofnewyork.us/infographics/
Focus Groups	https://harlemconditions.cityofnewyork.us/focus-groups/
Conclusion	https://harlemconditions.cityofnewyork.us/conclusion/
2022 Conference	https://harlemconditions.cityofnewyork.us/conference/
Conference Program	https://mcsilver.nyu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/conditions-in-harlem-program.pdf

For the Record Blog

<https://www.archives.nyc/blog/2019/3/1/the-mayors-commission-on-conditions-in-harlem-1935>

<https://www.archives.nyc/blog/2022/9/30/conditions-in-harlem-revisited-from-the-1936-mayors-commission-report-to-today>

EMPLOYMENT & RELIEF

From 1910 through 1930, Harlem experienced significant growth in its Black population. Between 1910 and 1920 alone, the number of Black residents increased from 28,690 to 83,597, and by 1930 the population exceeded 200,000. During this period, many Harlemites encountered discriminatory practices both within federal and city agencies that administered work relief and among private employers.

The Commission's Employment Subcommittee found that Black workers were frequently classified as "unskilled," even when they possessed substantial training and education. These practices severely limited access to stable, well-paying jobs and contributed to deep frustration within the Black community. Discrimination in government employment intensified over time, while private employers often refused to hire Black workers altogether or confined them to the lowest-paid and least secure positions.

Click [here](#) and [here](#) to learn more about "*The Problem with Making a Living and the Relief Situation.*"

QUESTIONS—EMPLOYMENT & RELIEF

1. Review Table I in Chapter III of the original report, which describes the percentage of Black men and women employed in major jobs in Manhattan between 1910-1930. What trends or patterns do you observe over time, and which types of jobs show the most significant changes?
2. Based on the data and narrative in the report, which industries or occupations did Harlem's Black residents most commonly rely on for employment? What factors may have contributed to this concentration?
3. In Chapter III, Section 3 ("Discrimination in Employment," page 5), what specific ways does

QUESTIONS—EMPLOYMENT & RELIEF (CONTINUED)

the report describe Black workers being excluded from or limited within the broader labor market?

4. The opening pages of Chapter IV discuss how racial discrimination in employment shaped access to relief. How does the report connect discrimination, unemployment, and relief efforts, and what broader impacts did these connections have on the Harlem community?

HOUSING

The housing chapter of the report documented an estimated 800 percent increase in Harlem’s Black population between 1920 and 1935, making the neighborhood one of the most densely populated areas in New York City. Much of the available housing was in severe disrepair, yet residents were charged disproportionately high rents. Families commonly paid between \$30 and \$50 per month, while residents of the Lower East Side living in comparable buildings often paid less than \$20.

The housing crisis in Harlem offers one of the clearest illustrations of structural and interpersonal racism present in New York City — and across the United States — during the 1930s. Discriminatory employment practices, residential segregation, and the economic pressures of the Great Depression all played a role in creating the living conditions in which Black families were forced to live.

Visit [here](#) and [here](#) to learn more about “*The Housing Problem.*”

QUESTIONS—HOUSING

1. What were the key issues that impacted the housing crisis in Harlem in the 1930s?
2. What role did structural racism play in maintaining and exacerbating the poor living conditions in Harlem?
3. What role did landlords play in the Harlem housing crisis?
4. What evidence of racial discrimination and bias is present in the language and framing of the Commission Report?

EDUCATION

The Education and Recreation Subcommittee had the responsibility of examining conditions in Harlem’s schools and assessing access to educational and recreational resources available to residents.

Explore website sections on “*Education and Recreation*” [here](#) and [here](#).

QUESTIONS—EDUCATION

1. Referring to the first page of [Chapter VI](#), what factors does the Commission identify as contributing to the lack of resources in Harlem’s schools?
2. Using [Chapter VI](#), how does the report describe the physical conditions of the average classroom in Harlem? What do these descriptions suggest about students’ learning environments?
3. On page 117 in [Chapter IX](#), what conclusions and recommendations did the Commission make regarding education in Harlem? Based on subsequent history or contemporary conditions, in what ways did the city government act on — or fail to act on — these recommendations?

HEALTH & HOSPITALIZATION

Chapter VII of the Commission’s report exposed serious deficiencies in the health care system that compounded already high mortality rates driven by economic hardship and substandard housing. The opening section documents how disease and premature death disproportionately affected Black residents of Central Harlem. The report notes exceptionally high tuberculosis mortality rates, explaining that during the five years ending in 1933, the annual average death rate from tuberculosis in four Central Harlem health areas—where more than 95 percent of residents were Black—ranged from 241 to 319 per 100,000 people.

By contrast, East Harlem — where approximately 10 percent of the population was Black — had greater access to health services and significantly lower mortality rates from the infectious diseases prevalent at the time. In addition to tuberculosis, Central Harlem experienced alarmingly high rates of infant mortality, maternal mortality, and deaths from diphtheria. As the report makes clear, these outcomes were linked to interconnected factors including economic inequality, overcrowding, and poor housing conditions.

Visit [here](#) and [here](#) to learn more about *Health and Hospitalization*. Also, review [letters](#) to Eunice H. Carter from James H Ravenell and Ralph B. Thompson.

QUESTIONS—HEALTH & HOSPITALIZATION

1. Refer to page 83 in [Chapter VII](#). The Public Health Nursing Service is described as “a deliberate attempt to establish a Jim Crow set up.” What does the report mean by this phrase, and how does it relate to the organization and operation of the Central Harlem Health District?
2. Refer to pages 86–87 in [Chapter VII](#). What conditions and experiences contributed to the growing frustration among Black medical professionals at Harlem Hospital? Why was it important for the Commission to document these circumstances in the Commission’s Report?

3. According to the first paragraph of the [letter](#) from James H. Ravenell (first page), in which two hospitals could Black nurses work?
4. The second paragraph mentions that Black nurses were not employed by hospitals but work as “hospital helpers.” Using details from the article, compare and contrast the roles of the nurses and the hospital helpers.
5. Review the [letter](#) from Ralph B. Thompson (third page). Which organizations approved of this resolution? Why would Ralph B. Thompson want to send this resolution to the Riot Investigating Commission?

JUSTICE & POLICING

The Harlem Commission found among many other issues, that “unjust policing” was a major mitigating factor in the tinderbox that was Harlem in the 1930s. Although the Commission, concluded their report in March 1936, it was never widely distributed and not revisited until 2022, after generations of the same issues it covered continued to exist.

Click [here](#) and [here](#) for sections of the website about Crime and the Police.

QUESTIONS—JUSTICE & POLICING

1. According to the report, for what types of offenses were juveniles in Harlem most frequently arrested? What patterns do you notice in these arrests?
2. What evidence does the report provide to illustrate discriminatory policing practices and violations of residents’ rights in Harlem? Cite specific examples.
3. The Commission’s report identifies police brutality against Black residents as a major factor contributing to the 1935 Harlem Riot. How did the Commission arrive at this conclusion, and what evidence did the multiracial committee present to support it?

CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

Throughout the report, the Commission emphasized that the most fundamental challenge facing Harlem’s Black residents was economic inequality. Low-wage employment, discriminatory hiring practices, unequal educational opportunities, and limited paths for advancement worked together to restrict economic mobility. The report noted that these conditions generated deep frustration among Black workers and contributed to broader tensions within the community.

See the [newspaper article](#) "*Mayor Withholds Report on Cause of Harlem Riot*" in Chapter IX, Conclusions and Recommendations.

QUESTIONS—CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Why might Mayor LaGuardia have chosen to review the report carefully before making it public? Based on the report’s findings and recommendations, why do you think the City may have been slow—or unwilling—to act on them?
2. Examine the details presented in the fourth paragraph of the newspaper article. How effectively does the article convey the severity of the health conditions in Central Harlem? What information is emphasized, minimized, or omitted?

HARLEM THEN & NOW

Please refer to the [charts](#) related to Health, Employment, Housing and Crime.

QUESTIONS—HARLEM THEN & NOW

1. Examine the health document on the [Infographic](#) page. Using the data provided, calculate which had a higher death rate: tuberculosis in the 1930s or COVID-19 in recent years. Based on what you have learned from the Harlem Conditions Report, what factors may have contributed to the tuberculosis death rate? What factors do you think contributed to the death rate from COVID-19?
2. Using the employment chart for 1930–1935, identify which job sectors employed the greatest number of men and women. What does this suggest about the types of employment opportunities available to Harlem residents at the time? How does this data illustrate patterns of racial inequality?
3. Refer to the housing chart and compare Box 1 for the periods 1930–1935 and 2018–2021. In 1930–1935, 84.2% of residential buildings were 35 years or older; in 2018–2021, the figure was 81.2%. What might this indicate about the pace of new construction or redevelopment in Central Harlem over the past 90 years? How could this affect residents' living conditions?
4. Examine the delinquency chart. "Immoral conduct" was the most common offense for which women were arrested in 1935. What does this reveal about societal expectations and the policing of women's behavior at the time? How do these expectations compare with those of 2021?

CONCLUSION

The Commission's 1936 report is a valuable resource for understanding how Harlem residents—and New Yorkers more broadly—viewed community issues at the time. It also highlights the close connections between city officials and community leaders in examining and responding to these concerns.

Many of the challenges identified in the report continued to intensify in the decades that followed and, in some cases, remain relevant today. Issues that frustrated Harlemites in 1935 can still be seen in Harlem and in other neighborhoods across New York City.

Although the report was initially set aside, it has recently been revisited by city officials, community leaders, educators, and students. The [website](#) offers an opportunity to engage with the report and reflect on its significance for understanding New York City's past as well as its future.

CULMINATING ACTIVITIES

Activity A

The NYC Department of Records and Information Services co-hosted a conference with the Schomburg Center for Research on Black Culture, the McSilver Institute for Poverty Policy and Research, NYC Speaks, and the journal *Vital City* to examine how conditions in Harlem have changed—or remained the same—since the publication of the Commission’s report.

During the afternoon session, a panel of experts discussed present-day community needs in Harlem. Eboné Carrington, former CEO of NYC Health + Hospitals/Harlem and now Managing Director of Manatt Health, reflected on the report and current health challenges facing the community.

Watch a [recording](#) of the afternoon session from **2:23:50 - 2:33:50** and respond to the following questions:

1. What did Ms. Carrington refer to when she referred to “sameness?”
2. How did she describe the progress that has been made in Harlem’s healthcare system?
3. What ongoing challenges in Harlem’s health care system did she identify?

Activity B

Prior to this conference, [five focus groups](#) comprised of Harlem students and adults residents met to share their perspectives on the report in relation to present-day experiences. Divide the class into the following teams: *Employment, Government Services, Housing, Education, Healthcare, and Policing*. Each team should review the focus group responses related to its topic and identify key themes, concerns, and points of comparison to the 1936 report.

Have each group share its findings with the class and lead a discussion reflecting on how community perspectives connect past and present conditions in Harlem.