



CITY OF NEW YORK
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MANHATTAN COMMUNITY BOARD 10
RESOLUTION
Althea Gibson Street Co-Naming

RESOLUTION: To support the street co-naming of West 143rd Street between Adam Clayton Powell Boulevard and Malcolm X Boulevard as “Althea Gibson Way”.

WHEREAS: Althea Neale Gibson was born on August 25, 1927, in Silver, South Carolina. Gibson blazed a new trail in the sport of tennis, winning some of the sport's biggest titles in the 1950s, and broke racial barriers in professional golf as well.

WHEREAS: At a young age, Gibson moved with her family to Harlem, and lived at 135 W. 143rd Street. Gibson's life at this time had its hardships. Her family struggled to make ends meet, living on public assistance for a time, and Gibson struggled in the classroom, often skipping school altogether. However, Gibson loved to play sports — especially table tennis — and she soon made a name for herself as a local table tennis champion. Her skills were eventually noticed by musician Buddy Walker, who invited her to play tennis on local courts.

WHEREAS: After winning several tournaments hosted by the local recreation department, Gibson was introduced to the Harlem River Tennis Courts in 1941. Incredibly, just a year after picking up a racket for the first time, she won a local tournament sponsored by the American Tennis Association, an African American organization established to promote and sponsor tournaments for black players. She picked up two more ATA titles in 1944 and 1945. Then, after losing one title in 1946, Gibson won 10 straight championships from 1947 to 1956. Amidst this winning streak, she made history as the first African American tennis player to compete at both the U.S. National Championships (1950) and Wimbledon (1951).

WHEREAS: Gibson's success at those ATA tournaments paved the way for her to attend Florida A&M University on a sports scholarship. She graduated from the school in 1953, but it was a struggle for her to get by. At one point, she even thought of leaving sports altogether to join the U.S. Army. A good deal of her frustration had to do with the fact that so much of the tennis world was closed off to her. The white-dominated, white-managed sport was segregated in the United States, as was the world around it.

WHEREAS: The breaking point came in 1950, when Alice Marble, a former tennis No. 1 herself, wrote a piece in *American Lawn Tennis* magazine lambasting her sport for denying a player of Gibson's caliber to compete in the world's best tournaments. Marble's article caught notice, and by 1952 — just one year after becoming the first black player to compete at Wimbledon — Gibson was a Top 10 player in the United States. She went on to climb even higher, to No. 7 by 1953.

WHEREAS: In 1955, Gibson and her game were sponsored by the United States Lawn Tennis Association, which sent her around the world on a State Department tour that saw her compete in places like India, Pakistan and Burma. Measuring 5 feet, 11 inches, and possessing superb power and athletic skill, Gibson seemed destined for bigger victories.

WHEREAS: In 1956, it all came together when she won the French Open, Wimbledon and U.S. Open titles followed in both 1957 and 1958. (She won both the women's singles and doubles at Wimbledon in 1957, which was celebrated by a ticker-tape parade when she returned home to New York City.) In all, Gibson powered her way to 56 singles and doubles championships before turning pro in 1959. For her part, however, Gibson downplayed her pioneering role. "I have never regarded myself as a crusader," she states in her 1958 autobiography, *I Always Wanted to Be Somebody*. "I don't consciously beat the drums for any cause, not even the negro in the United States."

WHEREAS: As a professional, Gibson continued to win — she landed the singles title in 1960 — but just as importantly, she started to make money. She was reportedly paid \$100,000 for playing a series of matches before Harlem Globetrotter games. For a short time, too, the athletically gifted Gibson turned to golf, making history again as the first black woman ever to compete on the pro tour.

WHEREAS: Following her retirement, in 1971, Gibson was inducted into the International Tennis Hall of Fame. She stayed connected to sports, however, through several service positions. Beginning in 1975, she served 10 years as commissioner of athletics for New Jersey State. She was also a member of the Governor's Council on physical fitness.

WHEREAS: Once given the chance, she became a champion, a role model — and an icon. She became somebody. Somebody special. Through her talents and tenacity, Althea Gibson opened doors and opened minds.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that Manhattan Community Board 10 wishes to remember Althea Gibson by formally requesting that the New York City Council and the Mayor of New York City enact legislation to support the co-naming of West 143rd Street between Adam Clayton Powell Boulevard and Malcolm X Boulevard to "Althea Gibson Way" on April 1, 2020 by a vote of 29 YES; 0 NO; 0 ABSTENTION; and 0 recusals.