

Audre Lorde Residence



Audre Lorde Residence

LOCATION

Borough of Staten Island
207 St. Paul's Avenue

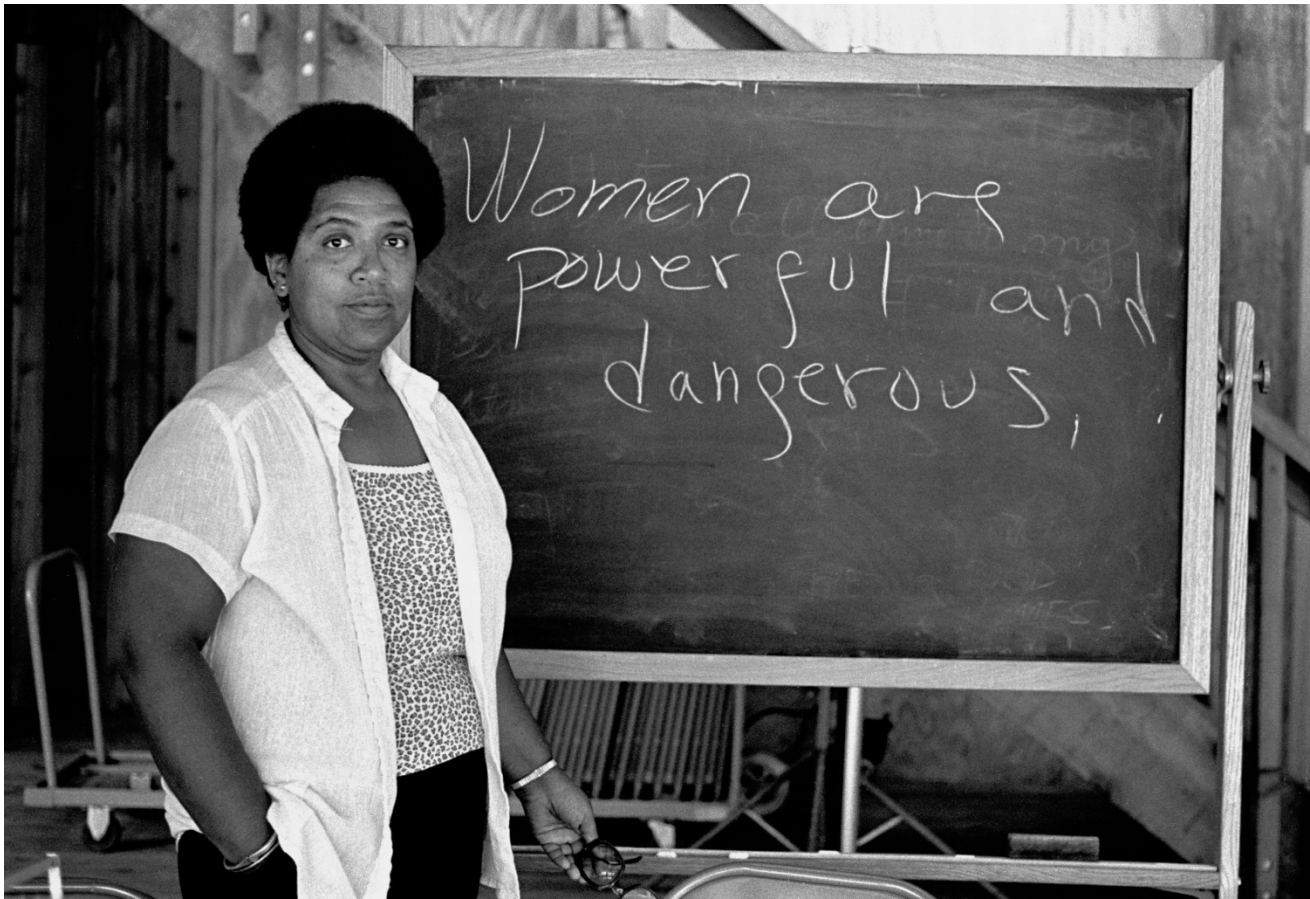
LANDMARK TYPE

Individual

SIGNIFICANCE

207 St. Paul's Avenue was the primary residence of Audre Lorde, the celebrated African-American writer, educator, Poet Laureate of New York, and outspoken advocate for feminism and LGBT rights, from 1972 to 1987. While living there she wrote some of her most ground-breaking work.





Audre Lorde, January 1983

(© Robert Alexander/Getty Images)

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Audre Lorde Residence

207 St. Paul's Avenue, Staten Island

Designation List 513

LP-2642

Built: 1898

Architect: Otto Loeffler

Landmark Site: Borough of Staten Island,
Tax Map Block 516, Lot 32

Calendared: May 14, 2019

Public Hearing: June 4, 2019

On June 4, 2019, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation of the Audre Lorde Residence as a New York City Landmark and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No.6). The hearing was duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of the law. A total of 37 people spoke in support of designation, including the property owner who noted he has no opposition to the proposed designation, but requested consideration for an existing deck; a representative of the New York City Council Speaker Cory Johnson who read a letter co-signed by the Speaker and State Senator Brad Hoylman, Assembly Members Deborah J. Glick and Daniel J. O'Donnell, New York City Council Members Daniel Dromm, Carlos Menchaca, Debi Rose, Ritchie Torres, Margaret Chin and Jimmy Van Bramer; a representative of New York State Assembly Member, Richard N. Gottfried; and representatives of the New York City LGBT Historic Sites Project, Alice Austin House, Historic Districts Council, New York Landmarks Conservancy, Save Chelsea, The Real Estate Board of New York, Bowery Alliance of Neighbors, The New York

Metropolitan Chapter of the Victorian Society, National Parks Conservation Association, and 17 individual individuals. No one spoke in opposition to the proposed designation. In addition, the Commission received 124 written submissions in favor of the proposed designation, including from Bronx Borough President Reuben Diaz, New York City Council Member Adrienne Adams, the Preservation League of New York State, and 121 individuals.

Summary

Audre Lorde Residence

The critically-acclaimed African-American novelist, poet, essayist, and feminist Audre Lorde (1934-1992) lived at 207 St. Paul's Avenue with her children and partner Frances Clayton from 1972 to 1987. During the family's time here Lorde survived breast cancer and produced some of her most famous works. Lorde, the self-proclaimed "black, lesbian, mother, warrior, poet,"¹ was a graduate of Columbia University and Hunter College, where she later held the prestigious post of Thomas Hunter Chair of Literature. She was also a professor of English at John Jay College and was appointed the New York State poet laureate in 1991. She published several significant books of prose and poetry, as well as articles in scholarly journals.

This neo-Colonial-style house at 207 St. Paul's Avenue on Staten Island was designed by Otto Loeffler in 1898, and is located within the St. Paul's Avenue-Stapleton Heights Historic District. Constructed during a period when several previously-undeveloped tracts in the neighborhood were developed with Queen Anne, Shingle-style, and Colonial-style homes, 207 St. Paul's Avenue is distinguished by its gabled roofline and by its open porch featuring turned columns and a pediment with sunburst decoration.

Audre Lorde was born in 1934 to Caribbean immigrants in New York City, where she attended Hunter College and Columbia University. She worked as a public school librarian for several years before finding success as a writer, and later became an English professor at Hunter and John Jay Colleges. Lorde purchased 207 St. Paul's Avenue in

1972 and wrote many of her most famous books and poems during the time she occupied this house. In 1973, her third volume of poetry, *From a Land Where Other People Live*, was nominated for a National Book Award, and over the next several years she published important poetry collections, essays, and novels, including *Coal* (1976), *The Black Unicorn* (1978), *The Cancer Journals* (1980), and *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name* (1982).

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, Lorde also became a prominent political activist in a number of arenas, including African-American civil rights, feminism, and the gay and lesbian movement. In 1979 Lorde spoke at the National March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights, and in 1980 she co-founded Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press, a publisher dedicated to producing work by and about women of color. Her book *I Am Your Sister: Black Women Organizing Across Sexualities* (1986) was one of its publications.

For her contributions to literature and activism, in 1991, Lorde was appointed as the Poet Laureate for New York State, a position she held until her death in 1992.

Building Description

Audre Lorde Residence²

The house features a cross gable roof, a single projecting angled bay at the first and second stories, and a full-width wooden porch on brick supports, featuring lattice-work screened base, tapered columns, wooden railings, wood steps and platform, shed roof, and triangular pediment with a sunburst and swag-decorated friezes. The main entry features a historic paneled wood double-leaf door with a molded surround. Windows have molded surrounds, and retain historic one-over-one wood sashes. The roof features intersecting gables with closed pediments and overhanging eaves, and a brick chimney. A gabled dormer on the south slope includes paired fenestration, and closed pediment with fluted pilasters. There is a Palladian window at the attic story of the main facade with arched sash, wood tracery, molded arch, fluted pilasters, flared lintels, and wood shutters.

Rear (East) Facade

Three bays wide with a projecting bay on the east side; similar to the main facade, with historic one-over-one wood sash, and a non-historic aluminum drainpipe from the roof.

Side (South) Façade

Contains an irregular bay window arrangement, with an oriel window at the first story with asphalt-covered hip roof; similar to the main facade, and historic one-over-one wood sashes, and a non-historic aluminum drainpipe from the roof.

Notable site features include historic wrought-iron

fence and gates; non-historic wooden car port with screens, bracketing, and carved decoration

Alterations present at time of association with Audre Lorde

The front porch was altered, part of the side bay was removed, the side walls were shingled, and the roof was covered with asphalt in 1931 (ALT 25-1931; aluminum siding was installed in the mid-20th century.

Later Alterations

The house was converted from a one-family dwelling to a two-family dwelling in 2005, (ALT-500799120-2005) and a two-story wood deck with brick supports, wooden railings, wood steps and platform, and full-width balcony with wood tapered columns and wooden railings was added on the rear (south) facade. The non-historic wooden car port has been enclosed with wooden doors.

History and Significance

Audre Lorde Residence

Audre Lorde: Formative Early Years

On February 18, 1934, Audre Geraldine Lorde was born in New York City, the last of three daughters born to Caribbean parents.³ Her father Frederick Byron Lorde was originally from Barbados, and her mother Linda Belmar Lorde was from Carriacou, a small town in Grenada.⁴ In 1924 the couple immigrated to New York City⁵ and first settled in Harlem, on West 142nd Street. The family would move several times as their income increased, finally settling in Washington Heights.

Audre Lorde was born with obstacles to overcome, “so nearsighted that she was considered legally blind.”⁶ Lorde started school in 1939, and her introduction to formal education started at Catholic grammar schools, where she later described facing ridicule and racism from the nuns and her classmates. In her “biomythography” *Zami*, Lorde recalls: “Then came my first rude awakening about school; ‘Ability had nothing to do with expectation.’”⁷

Harlem in the late 1930s was in transition and several areas were still racially mixed; Audre Lorde learned at an early age the injustices of racism. She remembered being spat on several times, and described “shrinking from a hoarsely sharp guttural rasp, because it often meant a nasty glob of grey spittle on her coat or shoe”⁸ Because Lorde’s parents came from the Caribbean Island nation of Grenada, “American racism” was a new reality they had not experienced before. Lorde later recalled that, “they chose not to acknowledge it, not give it a name, and when its injustice did rankle them it was in private,

and never in front of their children.”⁹ Her mother would excuse it as “low-class people with no manners spitting into the wind.”¹⁰ With no options in which to fight the racism she and her family faced daily; “her mother could not change the reality they faced, but she could change her perception of it.”¹¹

Growing up, Audre was held to high standards by her parents and felt misunderstood and un-loved. To help endure the pain of ridicule at home and during her early school years, she began writing poems, privately to express what she was going through, and later said it saved her life. She wrote her first poem at the age of twelve or thirteen; to her, words were powerful, and throughout her life she would express her feelings and experiences through poetry, essays, and prose. According to a recent interview, Lorde’s daughter Dr. Elizabeth Lorde Rollins recalled that often when she asked her mother questions when she was a teenager, her mother would respond to her by reciting poetry.¹² Lorde described the importance of poetry especially to women in her essay, “Poetry is Not a Luxury”:

For women, then, poetry is not a luxury. It is a vital necessity of our existence. It forms the quality of the light within which we predicate our hopes and dreams toward survival and change, first made into language, then into idea, then into more tangible action. Poetry is the way we help give name to the nameless so it can be thought. The farthest horizons of our hopes and fears are cobbled by our poems, carved from the rock experiences of our daily lives.¹³

When the family moved to an apartment on West 152nd Street between Amsterdam and Broadway in Washington Heights in 1945, they were the first black family on the street.¹⁴ Audre was enrolled in

Catholic school on the next block, where she was the only black student in her class, and an instant outcast.¹⁵

In 1947, she convinced her parents to let her apply to Hunter High School,¹⁶ which at the time was a private all-girls school on the Upper East Side. Lorde flourished in this setting, it was a small (predominantly white) and the students were considered “intellectually gifted.”¹⁷ Audre excelled academically, she reportedly loved the “emotional complexity” of poets Elinor Wylie and Edna St. Vincent Millay,¹⁸ and her own early poetry embraced “complexity and intensity.”¹⁹ At Hunter she met like-minded people, and according to her, her first “real friends,”²⁰ who would share their poetry before classes. Her teachers, however, labeled her a “sensualist poet” and would not publish her work in the school newspaper. Lorde submitted her poem “Spring” to *Seventeen Magazine* and it was published in the April 1951 issue, the first time she was paid for her work. At her graduation in June 1951, she was praised as one of the school’s “future poets.”²¹ She received a scholarship from Sarah Lawrence College but didn’t attend because her parents could not afford the balance of the tuition.

Adulthood

In the fall of 1951, Lorde enrolled at the City University of New York’s Hunter College, majoring in English and minoring in philosophy, and moved in with a friend on Rivington Street.²² Starting in the mid-1950s and 1960s her work was published in several anthologies. Lorde joined the Harlem Writers Guild, started in the late 1940s by Jon Henrik Clark and several others.²³ The weekly Thursday meetings connected her to an organized “black consciousness,” and it was through this association one of her poems was published in *Harlem Writers Quarterly* in spring 1952 edition.²⁴

In 1952 Audre dropped out of college and

moved to Stamford, Connecticut. While there she worked at Keystone Electronics, where she was said to have been exposed to deadly chemicals that may have contributed to her cancer later in life.²⁵

In February 1953, Audre left for Mexico, and enrolled in classes at Ciudad Universitaria in Mexico City.²⁶ She stayed in Cuernavaca, a bohemian suburb of Mexico City. There, surrounded by beauty and light, Lorde had an “insight into what poetry could be,” and came to the realization that “her poetry could re-create feelings.”²⁷ Lorde saw that Mexico was a “haven for political and spiritual refugees.”²⁸ She was introduced to many expatriates, including Frieda Mathews, Agnes Kaufman, Hope Faye, and several others, most political outlaws during the McCarthy years. While there, Lorde met Eudora Garrett, a journalist who became an important person during that time in her life, and “helped her find a deeper sense of herself as a lesbian.”²⁹ Lorde said of her time in Mexico that “It was in Mexico that I stopped feeling invisible.”³⁰ In Cuernavaca she “glimpsed at what she was always craving, a community of women.”³¹

In 1954 Lorde returned to New York City, and in 1955 enrolled at Hunter College, graduating in 1959. She then enrolled at Columbia University in 1961, earning a master’s degree in library science. In 1962 she married lawyer Edward Ashley Rollins; he was white, and both were bisexual so she considered it a “social experiment.”³² Lorde and Rollins had two children: a daughter, Elizabeth Marion Lorde-Rollins born March 1963,³³ and a son, Jonathan Frederick Ashley Rollins, born in August 1964.³⁴

While working as a librarian at the Mount Vernon Public Library, two of Lorde’s poems, “Father Son and Holy Ghost” and “Coal” were published by a small press in England, in the anthology *Beyond the Blues*.³⁵ In the summer of 1962, eight of her poems dating from 1952 to 1962 were included in volume II of the *Heritage*

anthology, *Sixes and Sevens* published by another small London press, owned and edited by Paul Breman. This brought Lorde the recognition as a poet that had previously been elusive, and she said, gave her a sense of “poetic excitement.”³⁶ Langston Hughes was familiar with Audre Lorde’s work from her time at the Harlem Writers Guild and deliberately sought her out to submit two poems for an anthology. Lorde’s poems “And Fall Shall Sit in Judgment” and “Pirouette,” appeared in the *New Negro Poets, USA*,” published in 1964.³⁷

In 1967 Reverend Sofeld conducted an interview with Audre Lorde and wrote a lengthy analysis of her body of work to that point. Sofeld’s essay was very critical of her recent productivity, wondering what happened to the earlier “promise of this bright talented poet?”³⁸ This had an impact on Lorde and fueled her productivity in the 1970s.

In 1968, while working as a librarian at a private school in Manhattan, Lorde received a call from Diane di Prima, who headed the independent publisher, The Poets Press, which was assisted by grants from the National Endowment of the Arts. Di Prima urged Lorde to write a book of poetry. Audre Lorde’s first book of poetry *The First Cities* was published in April 1968. Critics of the day considered the book “innovative and refreshing,” and by the critic Dudley Randell of the *Negro Digest*, “a quiet introspective book.”³⁹ Lorde was asked to submit a poem to the *Negro Digest*, another mark of distinction. The 1960s were as dubbed the “new Black Renaissance,” and many artists of the era were expressing themselves in new and radically different ways; Lorde’s poem, “Naturally” questioning the bombast of the Black Pride Movement at this time, was selected by the editors.⁴⁰

In 1968 Lorde received funding from the National Endowment of the Arts to serve as a poet-in-residence at Tougaloo College, a historically black college in Mississippi.

With no formal training as a teacher of poetry, Lorde began a poetry workshop, starting with eight to ten students; she initially asked her students their interest, “what they wanted to write about,” and “why they wanted to write.”⁴¹ While at Tougaloo College, Lorde’s openness in telling her students that she was a black woman married to a white man, encouraged her students to “examine a more complex black reality... they could examine their own firsthand knowledge of blackness, not just the rhetoric of blackness.”⁴² This dialog would lead to Lorde’s later “theory of difference,” a series of essays and speeches that were included in later books.⁴³ Inspired by her students, Lorde wrote a great deal during this time, and the works would later become her second collection of poems, *Cable to Rage*, published in 1970. In this book, Lorde introduced readers to her form of protest poetry, and most importantly, she came out as a lesbian, in the poem *Martha*; the longest piece in the volume.⁴⁴

During Lorde’s time at Tougaloo College, she met and fell in love with an exchange professor in psychology from Brown University, Frances Clayton, who would later become her partner for close to 20 years.

In September 1968 Lorde accepted a teaching position at City College of New York in the SEEK Program.⁴⁵ In the fall of 1969 Lorde started teaching at Herman H. Lehman College in the Bronx.

The 1970s to the 1980s were a time of transition for Lorde: during the early 1970s, she became a literary scout for Dial Press,⁴⁶ divorced her husband, solidified her relationship with Clayton, and purchased a home with her in Staten Island. Over the next decade Audre Lorde would reinvent herself and become a self-proclaimed “black, lesbian, mother, warrior, poet.”⁴⁷

207 St. Paul’s Avenue

Audre Lorde lived at 207 St. Paul’s Avenue with her

children and partner Frances Clayton from 1972 to 1987. 207 St. Paul's Avenue lies within the St. Paul's Avenue-Stapleton Heights Historic District. This neo-Colonial-style house was designed by the prolific Stapleton architect Otto Loeffler and built in 1898 as the residence of Andrew Jackson, a harbor pilot, during the period when several previously-undeveloped tracts in the historic district were developed with Queen Anne, Shingle, and Colonial-style homes. The house is distinguished by its open porch featuring turned columns and closed pediment with sunburst and its gabled roofline. 207 St. Paul's Avenue remains a well-preserved example of neo-Colonial-style residential architecture.

After a year of searching for a suitable home,⁴⁸ Lorde and Clayton purchased 207 St. Paul's Avenue in July 1972, for \$37,750.⁴⁹ Lorde fell in love with the house, calling it "a diamond in the rough," while Clayton called it a "money-guzzler."⁵⁰ The house was large, with three floors, and a backyard for the children to play safely. It was a ferry ride to Manhattan, and it appealed to both women because it was surrounded by "space and trees."⁵¹ Love and care went into making the home their own, and Lorde set up her study on the second floor. In an interview with Louise Chawla, she explained that the house provided a compromise between her bond with nature (here she could have trees, a garden, and overlook water) and her commitment to raising her children in New York City.⁵² The family's time in Staten Island was not without complexities, they experienced many acts of racism while living at the house.⁵³

The years that Audre Lorde lived at 207 St. Paul's Avenue were important and prolific in terms of the high volume of work she accomplished there. Lorde wrote and published nine books and poetry collections while she resided at 207 St. Paul's Avenue with her two children and her partner Clayton. Lorde's third volume of poetry *From a*

Land Where Other People Live, was written in 1973, published by Broadside Press, and was nominated for the 1974 National Book Award for poetry. Lorde's next work, *New York Head Shop and Museum* published in 1975, spoke of Lorde's political and social views. That same year, Lorde would travel across the country, giving readings at colleges, universities, public libraries and community centers, to promote her work.⁵⁴ *Coal* was published in 1976 by W. W. Norton Press, the first of her works published by a mainstream publisher. The book was a compilation of poems from her earlier publications *The First Cities* and *Cables to Rage*. *Between Ourselves*, was published in 1976 by her friend di Prima's Eidolon Editions, with the art work on the cover by Lorde featuring an Asante adinkra symbol.⁵⁵ Considered by critics as the most complex and successful of Lorde's works, *The Black Unicorn Poems*, was written in 1978. Here Lorde used African symbols and mythology to communicate her ideas about women, racial pride, motherhood, and spirituality. Her poem, "A Litany for Survival" from this volume speaks to empowerment:⁵⁶

...and when we speak we are afraid
our words will not be heard
nor welcomed
but when we are silent
we are still afraid
So it is better to speak
Remembering
we were never meant to survive.⁵⁷

Lorde's book of essays, *Uses of the Erotic: the Erotic as Power* was also published in 1978.

The year 1978 also brought serious health challenges when Lorde was diagnosed with breast cancer. Although horrified and afraid, she turned to chronicling her journey in *The Cancer Journals*, her first piece of non-fiction, published in 1980. In the book, Lorde confronted the possibility of her death and "advocated women's ability, responsibility, and

right to make decisions about their health.”⁵⁸ In 1981, *The Cancer Journals* won the American Library Association Gay Caucus Book of the Year Award.⁵⁹ In 1982 Lorde transformed her writing again, publishing *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name* a “Biomythography,” filled with reflection and prose. The book was heralded by critics as “timely and ahead of its time,” chronicling her younger years coming of age in Harlem from the 1930s to the late 1950s.⁶⁰ The book explored her life as lesbian, artist and intellectual. Through these works Lorde broke new ground as a black lesbian feminist writer. *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*, published in 1984, expounds on her theories on human difference.⁶¹

The Kitchen Table Press

The Kitchen Table Press was conceptualized during a 1980 telephone conversation between Lorde and co-founder Barbra Smith. Lorde and Smith realized that they needed to take control of publishing their own work, because “freedom of the press belongs to those who own the press.”⁶² It was difficult for women of color to be published; both commercial and alternative publishing houses were white male-dominated, and African-American, Latino, and Feminist writers were published as an “act of mercy or on a whim.”⁶³

In 1981 ten women co-founded Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press, including Audre Lorde, Barbra Smith, Cherríe Moraga, Hattie Gossett, Helena Byard, Susan Yung, Ana Oliveira, Rosío Alvarez, Alma Gomez and Leota Lone Dog.⁶⁴ Smith stated in an interview “that Kitchen Table Press was about the need for autonomy, our need to determine independently both the content and the conditions of our work and to control the words and images that were produced about us.”⁶⁵ Their 1981 press description stated:

Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press

is the only Publisher in North America committed to publishing and distributing the writing of Third World Women of all racial/cultural heritages, sexualities, and classes.

The first books published by Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press included three important anthologies: Alma Gómez and Cherríe Moraga's *Cuentos: Stories by Latinas* (1983); Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa's *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (1984); Barbara Smith's *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology* first published in 1984. Several books by Audre Lorde were published by the press including *I Am Your Sister: Black Women Organizing Across Sexualities*, in 1986.

Activism

As an activist, Lorde protested the Vietnam War and participated in both the civil rights and feminist movements. In 1979 Lorde spoke at the National March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights.⁶⁶ In 1983 Lorde was asked to speak at the March on Washington for Jobs, Peace, and Freedom, commemorating the 20th anniversary of the Martin Luther King, Jr. “I Have a Dream” speech, representing the National Coalition of Black Lesbian and Gay Men. The organization had to fight to be included in the march.⁶⁷ Lorde was the only person from the Lesbian and Gay movement allowed to speak. In her speech she told the crowd that “today the black civil rights movement has pledged its support of the gay civil rights struggle, and that “there was strength in diversity,” That day Lorde told a reporter that her speech was “a defining moment for the black civil right movement and the lesbian and gay movement.” Later, reflecting on the “March” Lorde said “she’d felt victimized by the homophobia of others and had to struggle not to feel like a

victim.”⁶⁸

Throughout the years, Lorde fought against the invisibility of black lesbians in mainstream media, so when *Essence Magazine* wanted Lorde to take part in a “planned conversation” with James Baldwin that would be published in the magazine, she agreed.⁶⁹ The conversation between Audre Lorde and James Baldwin was taped over a two-day period, and lasted for five hours. What was published by the magazine was a distilled version of the conversation, and the article never mentioned that either was homosexual. The article expounded on Lorde’s position as a black feminist, and it also looked at the common racial histories and the vastly different gender histories of black men and women.⁷⁰

In early 1984 close to her 50th birthday, Lorde was diagnosed with metastatic liver cancer. According to her biography by Alexis De Veaux it took her more than a year to finally accept the fact that she again had cancer.⁷¹

Lorde did not let her diagnosis stop her from accepting a teaching position at the Free University of Berlin in the summer of 1984, and returned to teach each summer until her death in 1992. Teaching in Europe gave Lorde a new perspective she referred to as a “globalization of her consciousness of women of color.”⁷² While at a book fair in London, she first saw first-hand that her work was reaching a large, international audience, including black women and feminists, both gay and straight, from England, the Pacific Islands, Australia, Scotland and many other places across the globe.⁷³ After meeting so many women of African descent across Europe, she would also re-examine how she used the word “black” to define a person of African descent; Lorde thought of the word as a label. She encouraged the women she met to use a different term when defining who they were, or a composition of both: Afro and European. Afro-German women said the term gave them “a new sense of self and community.”⁷⁴ Lorde’s

influence in Berlin would later be the focus of a documentary by her friend Dr. Dagmar Schultz.⁷⁵

While in Berlin, Lorde underwent a new untested treatment for her cancer.⁷⁶ In 1985, she felt the treatment was working, and was well enough to participate in the 150th Women’s Festival in Melbourne, Australia.⁷⁷ She also traveled to Cuba a part of a delegation of black women writers,⁷⁸ and to Auckland, New Zealand where she met with Maori and Pacific Island women. She said these trips “increased her knowledge and understanding of the struggles of women of color”⁷⁹ beyond the western hemisphere. In December 1985, The Audre Lorde Poetry Center was dedicated at Hunter College, highlighting the significance of her legacy and her connection to a new generation of women poets.⁸⁰

In 1986, after experimental treatments in Switzerland proved to be impractical, Lorde returned to New York.⁸¹ Lorde attended a conference in St. Croix in April on “Caribbean Women: The Historical and Cultural Ties that Bind.”⁸² Lorde said of the Caribbean, “it felt like home, it reminded her of her mother’s home of Carriacou, Grenada.”⁸³ She felt that there, with her friend Gloria Joseph, was “the spiritual medicine,” and that she was “one among many, a community of women,” something that she always wanted.⁸⁴ Lorde published *A Burst of Light*, detailing her time at the conference; it also chronicles her fight with liver cancer, and contains essays on women’s fight against oppression. The book would go on to win a Before Columbus Foundation National Book Award in 1988.⁸⁵

In 1987, Lorde decided to sell the house at 207 St. Paul’s Avenue for many reasons, most importantly because she felt that “to change her life she must also change her surroundings.”⁸⁶ Fully invested in her new relationship with Gloria Joseph, Lorde ended her seventeen-year relationship with Frances Clayton, who would move to California.

After the house was sold in 1988, Lorde

lived the remainder of her life in St. Croix with Gloria Joseph. Lorde's last book, published after her death, *The Marvelous Arithmetics of Distance*, was awarded the Lambda Literary Award for Lesbian Poetry, and was nominated for a National Book Critics Circle Award, both in 1994.⁸⁷ Lorde dedicated her last book of poetry to her newly found twin sisters Marjorie and Mavis.⁸⁸

In 1991, Governor Mario Cuomo named Audre Lorde New York State's poet laureate, citing an imagination "charged by a sharp sense of racial injustice and cruelty, of sexual prejudice."⁸⁹ After a 14-year battle with cancer, Lorde died on November 17, 1992.

Conclusion

The Audrey Lorde Residence at 207 St. Paul's Avenue served as the primary residence for famed African-American writer, poet, activist, and educator, Audre Lorde, her two children, and her partner Frances Clayton for more than fifteen years. While residing here, Lorde produced some of her most important work, writing a number of award-winning books of poetry, prose and essays that would contribute to her legacy.

The Poetry Foundation summarized Audre Lorde's significant literary, cultural and social contributions from her life's work:

She was central to many liberation movements and activist circles, including second-wave feminism, civil rights and Black cultural movements, and struggles for GLBQT equality. In particular, Lorde's poetry is known for the power of its call for social and racial justice, as well as its depictions of queer experience and sexuality.⁹⁰

A 2019 *New York Times* article described Audre

Lorde's work as still resonant today for its deep understanding of the ways that gender, class and race work together to define human experience. The strength and expressiveness of Lorde's poetry, her honesty and openness about her life as a lesbian, and her fight for the equality of all women, continue to inspire many people.⁹¹ Audre Lorde's legacy lives on also through the non-profit organization, The Audre Lorde Project, "a Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Two Spirit, Trans and Gender Non-Conforming People of Color center for community organizing, focusing on the New York City area."⁹²

Endnotes

¹ Poetry Foundation, “Audre Lorde, 1934-1992,”

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/audre-lorde>, accessed 05/30/2019.

² Adapted from: Landmarks Preservation Commission, St. Paul’s Avenue-Stapleton Heights Historic District Designation Report (LP-2147), (New York: City of New York, June 29, 2004), Prepared by Gale Harris and Donald Presa.

³ Lorde’s oldest sister Phyllis Lorde was born in 1929 and Helen Lorde was born in 1931. Alexis De Veaux, *Warrior Poet*, (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2004), 24-25.

⁴ Audre Lorde, *Zami, A New Spelling of My Name*, (Freedom, California: The Crossing Press, 1982), 9.

⁵ Lorde, *Zami*, 9.

⁶ De Veaux, 14.

⁷ Lorde, *Zami*, 27.

⁸ Lorde, *Zami*, 17.

⁹ Lorde, *Zami*, 69.

¹⁰ Lorde, *Zami*, 17.

¹¹ Lorde, *Zami*, 18.

¹² “Daughter Contributes to New Book Celebrating Legacy of Audre Lorde,” *Poetry Foundation, Poetry News* February 26, 2016, accessed 05/14/2019, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/harriet/2016/02/daughter-contributes-to-new-book-celebrating-legacy-of-audre-lorde->

¹³ Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Berkeley California: Crossing Press 2007), 36-39; also paraphrased on *Good Reads*, Audre Lorde Quotes, https://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/18486.Audre_Lorde?page=2 accessed 06/03/2019.

¹⁴ Two weeks later the landlord killed himself, it was reported in the local newspaper that he was ashamed that he had to rent to Negroes. Lorde, 58.

¹⁵ De Veaux, 24.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ According to the school’s website, “The High School was officially designated a laboratory school for the education of intellectually gifted girls in 1955.” <https://www.hunterschools.org/about/history> accessed 06/14/19

¹⁸ De Veaux, 25.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ De Veaux, 26.

²¹ De Veaux, 32.

²² De Veaux, 34.

²³ The Harlem Writers Guild was started in the late 1940s by Rosa Guy, John Oliver Killens, Walter Christmas, and John Henrik Clarke for young black writers seeking to hone their craft, express their creativity, and promote social change.

²⁴ De Veaux, 39.

²⁵ Lorde was exposed to carbon tetrachloride, known to cause liver and kidney cancer. De Veaux, 41.

²⁶ Lorde took courses in Mexican history, ethnology, and folk song. De Veaux, 50.

²⁷ De Veaux, 51.

²⁸ Ibid, 51.

²⁹ De Veaux, 53.

³⁰ Eudora told her she was, “more beautiful than you know.” “No one had ever said that to me before.” Lorde, 165.

³¹ Ibid. 173

³² De Veaux, 78. Rollins graduated from Columbia University Law School. Lorde stated that “Ed Rollins was the only man I ever considered marrying.” De Veaux, 64-65.

³³ De Veaux, 80.

³⁴ De Veaux, 84.

³⁵ De Veaux, 78.

³⁶ De Veaux, 81.

³⁷ De Veaux, 84-85.

³⁸ De Veaux, 90.

³⁹ De Veaux, 100.

⁴⁰ De Veaux, 116.

⁴¹ Poetry Foundation, "Audre Lorde, 1934-1992," <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/audre-lorde>, accessed 05/30/2019.

⁴² De Veaux, 96.

⁴³ These essays and speeches would become a part of "Sisters Outsider" published in 1984.

⁴⁴ "Overview Cable to Rage," *Oxford Reference*, <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803095540486>, accessed 06/06/2019; Beverly Threatt Kuli, Ann E. Reuman, and Ann Trapasso, *Modern American Poetry*, "Audre Lorde's Life and Career," https://www.english.illinois.edu/maps/poets/g_l/lorde/life.htm, accessed 01/21/2004; "The Poet Who Found Her Own Way," *New York Times*, December 19, 1982, BR12; Wanda Coleman, "Preacher Poet," *Los Angeles Times*, August 31, 1997, <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1997-aug-31-bk-27437-story.html>, accessed 06/03/2019.

⁴⁵ The program was designed to raise academic skills of African-American and Latina students. City College was located on 138th Street and Convent Avenue.

⁴⁶ De Veaux, 156.

⁴⁷ De Veaux, 156.

⁴⁸ De Veaux, 122.

⁴⁹ New York City Department of Taxation Form No. 6-254, Record of Conveyances.

⁵⁰ De Veaux, 123.

⁵¹ De Veaux, 123.

⁵² Louise Chawla, *Nature, Poetry, and Childhood Memory* (Albany: State of New York University Press, 1994), 124-125.

⁵³ De Veaux, 124-125.

⁵⁴ De Veaux, 161.

⁵⁵ De Veaux, 158.

⁵⁶ Becky Green, Aletnin Nguyen, (1996). Audre Lorde. *Voices from the Gaps*, Retrieved from the University of Minnesota Digital Conservancy, <http://hdl.handle.net/11299/166263>, accessed 09/19/2003.

⁵⁷ Audre Lorde, "A Litany for Survival" *The Black Unicorn Poems*, (New York: W. W. Norton & Co Ltd, 1978).

⁵⁸ *Audre Lorde Collection 1950-2002*, Spellman College Archives, accessed 05/06/2019.

⁵⁹ Beverly Threatt Kuli, Ann E. Reuman, and Ann Trapasso, *Modern American Poetry*, "Audre Lorde's Life and Career," https://www.english.illinois.edu/maps/poets/g_l/lorde/life.htm, accessed 01/21/2004.

⁶⁰ De Veaux, 314.

⁶¹ De Veaux, 315.

⁶² Barbra Smith, "A Press of Our Own, Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press," *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, v.10, No.3, Women and Words (1989), 11-13, https://ipfs.io/ipfs/QmXoypizjW3WknFiJnKLwHCnL72vedxjQkDDP1mXWo6uco/wiki/Kitchen_Table%3A_Women_of_Color_Press.html, accessed 05/17/2019.

⁶³ Smith, 11; Mel Watkins, "Sexism, Racism and Black Women Writers: Sexism, Racism and Black Women Writers Black Women Writers," *New York Times*, June 15, 1986, BR1; History.com Editors, "Black Women in Art and Literature," <https://www.history.com/topics/black-history/black-women-in-art-and-literature>, accessed 05/30/2018.

⁶⁴ Kayann Short, "Coming to the Table: The Differential Politics of This Bridge Called my Back", *Genders* 19 (1994), pp. 4-8.

⁶⁵ Smith, 11.

⁶⁶ Hannah Woulfe, "LGBT History: The National March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights," *National LGBT Chamber of Commerce*, <https://nglcc.org/blog/lgbt-history-national-march-washington-lesbian-and-gay-rights>, accessed 06/07/2019.

⁶⁷ De Veaux, 327.

⁶⁸ Ibid. There was no official credentials for her so she spent more time than necessary trying to gain access to the speaker's platform. Lorde later found out that "she was the only speaker that was required to submit their speech beforehand."

⁶⁹ De Veaux, 330-332.

⁷⁰ "Revolutionary Hope: Conversation Between James Baldwin and Audre Lorde," (excerpt from *Essence Magazine* December 1984), *The Culture*, <http://theculture.forharriet.com/2014/03/revolutionary-hope-conversation-between.html>, accessed 05/20/2019.

⁷¹ De Veaux, 342.

⁷² De Veaux, 343.

⁷³ De Veaux, 344.

⁷⁴ De Veaux, 344.

⁷⁵ Dagmar Schultz (2015). "Audre Lorde - The Berlin Years, 1984 to 1992". In Broeck, Sabine; Bolaki, Stella. *Audre Lorde's Transnational Legacies*. Boston, MA: University of Massachusetts Press. pp. 27–38. Lorde's impact on the Afro-German movement was the focus of the 2012 documentary by Dagmar Schultz.

⁷⁶ Three times weekly she would be injected with "Iscador" and herbal compound, and two other herbal treatments to stimulate the liver. This treatment would later be shown to achieve a clinically relevant prolongation of survival time of cancer patients and appears to stimulate self-regulation. Grossarth-Maticek R1, Kiene H, Baumgartner SM, Ziegler R., "Use of Iscador, an extract of European mistletoe (*Viscum album*), in cancer treatment: prospective nonrandomized and randomized matched-pair studies nested within a cohort study," *National Center for Biotechnology Information, U.S. National Library of Medicine*, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/11347286>, accessed 05/20/2019.

⁷⁷ The festival spotlighted the achievements, aspirations and needs of women and the undervaluation of women's achievements in history. De Veaux, 347.

⁷⁸ The delegation included: Toni Cade Bambara, Jayne Cortez, Rosa Guy, Gloria Joseph, and Mildred Pitts Walter.

⁷⁹ De Veaux, 351.

⁸⁰ Gina Rhodes, Who Said it Would Be Simple: Inauguration of the Audre Lorde Women's Poetry Center https://library.hunter.cuny.edu/old/sites/default/files/pdf/archive_articles/rhodes_who_said_it_would_be_simple_nodate_0.pdf.

⁸¹ De Veaux, 351.

⁸² The conference lasted four days, 200 women, from ten different countries participated. De Veaux, 353.

⁸³ De Veaux, 359.

⁸⁴ De Veaux, 358-359.

⁸⁵ De Veaux, 360 Audre Lorde Collection 1950-2002 Spellman College Archives, [https://www.spelman.edu/docs/archives-guides/audre-lorde-collection-finding-aid-\(2012\)be59fb34f9bd6490bbe9ff0000b1c0f4.pdf?sfvrsn=b8e49f50_0](https://www.spelman.edu/docs/archives-guides/audre-lorde-collection-finding-aid-(2012)be59fb34f9bd6490bbe9ff0000b1c0f4.pdf?sfvrsn=b8e49f50_0); accessed 05/09/2019; <https://poets.org/poet/audre-lorde>, accessed 05/30/2019.

⁸⁶ De Veaux, 356.

⁸⁷ *The Marvelous Arithmetics of Distance: Poems: 1987-1992*, <https://www.publishersweekly.com/978-0-393-035131>; <http://books.wwnorton.com/books/detail.aspx?ID=4294980752>; *Lambda Literary*, "6th Annual Lambda Literary Awards," July 13, 1994, <http://www.lambdaliterary.org/winners-finalists/07/13/lambda-literary-awards-1993/>, accessed 06/03/2019.

⁸⁸ Audre met her sister Mavis, one of the twin sisters that were born before her father Frederick, married Lorde's mother Linda, and Lorde said that, "she embraced her as her two older sisters never had".

⁸⁹ Ginia Bellafante, "Where Are the Statues of L.G.B.T.Q. Pioneers? Here Are 11 Worthy New Yorkers" *New York Times*, May 18, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/17/nyregion/lgbtq-statues-new-york.html?action=click&module=Features&pgtype=Homepage>.

⁹⁰ Poetry Foundation, "Audre Lorde, 1934-1992," <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/audre-lorde>, accessed 05/30/2019.

⁹¹ Ginia Bellafante, "Where Are the Statues of L.G.B.T.Q. Pioneers? Here Are 11 Worthy New Yorkers" *New York Times*, May 18, 2019.

⁹² The Audre Lorde Project INC., <https://alp.org/about> accessed 06/06/2019.

Findings and Designation

Audre Lorde Residence

On the basis of a careful consideration of the history, the architecture, and the other features of this building and site, the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that the Audre Lorde Residence has a special character and a special historical and aesthetic interest and value as part of the development, heritage, and culture characteristics of New York City.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 74, Section 3020 of the Charter of the City of New York and Chapter 3 of Title 25 of the Administrative Code of the City of New York, the Landmarks Preservation Commission designates as a Landmark the Audre Lorde Residence and designates Borough of Staten Island Tax Map Block 516, Lot 32 as its Landmark Site as shown in the attached map.



207 St. Paul's Avenue
New York City Department of Taxes Photograph (c. 1938-43),
Courtesy NYC Municipal Archives



West facade, 207 St. Paul's Avenue
Sarah Moses, June, 2019



South facade
Theresa C. Noonan, April, 2019



South facade
Theresa C. Noonan, April, 2019



West facade
Theresa C. Noonan, April, 2019



East facade
Theresa C. Noonan, April, 2019



West facade
Sarah Moses, June 2019



North West facade
Sarah Moses June 2019



South East facade
Sarah Moses, June 2019

