



# CITY OF NEW YORK MANHATTAN COMMUNITY BOARD 10

215 West 125th Street, 4th Floor New York, NY 10027

T: 212-749-3105 F: 212-662-4215

Website: <https://cbmanhattan.cityofnewyork.us/cb10/>

**Hon. Marquis A. Harrison**

Chairperson

**Minah Whyte**

District Manager

## **DR. MAYA ANGELOU STREET CO-NAMING RESOLUTION: TO SUPPORT THE CO-NAMING OF 120th STREET BETWEEN MALCOLM X BOULEVARD AND 5th AVENUE TO DR. MAYA ANGELOU PLACE**

**WHEREAS**, Manhattan Community Board 10 recommends the co-naming of West 120th Street between Malcolm X Boulevard and 5th Avenue to Dr. Maya Angelou Place; and

**WHEREAS**, Dr. Maya Angelou was the homeowner of 58 W. 120th Street; and

**WHEREAS**, Maya Angelou, born Marguerite Annie Johnson; (April 4, 1928 – May 28, 2014) was an American poet, singer, memoirist, and civil rights activist. As an author, she published seven autobiographies, three essays, and several poetry books, and was credited with a list of plays, movies, and television shows spanning over 50 years. She received dozens of awards and more than 50 honorary degrees. Dr. Angelou is best known for her series of seven autobiographies, which focus on her childhood and early adult experiences. The first; *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1969), tells of her life up to the age of 17, brought her international recognition and acclaim; and

**WHEREAS**, Dr. Angelou met novelist John Oliver Killens in 1959 and, at his urging, moved to New York to concentrate on her writing career. She joined the Harlem Writers Guild, where she met several major African-American authors, including John Henrik Clarke, Rosa Guy, Paule Marshall, and Julian Mayfield, and was published for the first time. In 1960, after meeting civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. and hearing him speak, she and Killens organized "the legendary" Cabaret for Freedom to benefit the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), and she was named SCLC's Northern Coordinator. Scholar Lyman B. Hagen said her contributions to civil rights as a fundraiser and SCLC organizer were successful and "eminently effective". Dr. Angelou also began her pro-Castro and anti-apartheid activism during this time; and

**WHEREAS**, In 1961, Angelou performed in Jean Genet's play *The Blacks*, along with Abbey Lincoln, James Earl Jones, Louis Gossett, Godfrey Cambridge, and Cicely Tyson. Also in 1961, she met South African freedom fighter Vusumzi Make; they never officially married. She and her son Guy moved with Make to Cairo, where Angelou worked as an associate editor at the weekly English-language newspaper *The Arab Observer*; and

**WHEREAS**, In Accra, Dr. Angelou became close friends with Malcolm X during his visit in the early 1960s. She returned to the U.S. in 1965 to help him build a new civil rights organization; the Organization of Afro-American Unity. Malcolm X was assassinated shortly afterward. Devastated and adrift, she joined her brother in Hawaii, where she resumed her singing career. She moved back to Los Angeles to focus on her writing career. Working as a market researcher in Watts, Angelou witnessed the riots in the summer of 1965. She acted in and wrote plays, and returned to New York in 1967. She met her lifelong friend Rosa Guy and renewed her friendship with James Baldwin, whom she had met in Paris in the 1950s; and

**WHEREAS**, Dr. Angelou was asked to organize a march by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in 1968, sadly, Dr. King was assassinated before the event could take place, ironically on her 40th birthday; Despite having almost no experience; and

**WHEREAS**, Dr. Angelou wrote, produced, and narrated *Blacks, Blues, Black!*, a ten-part series of documentaries about the connection between blues music and black Americans' African heritage, and what Angelou called the "Africanisms still current in the U.S." for National Educational Television, the precursor of PBS. Also in 1968, inspired at a dinner party she attended with Baldwin, cartoonist Jules Feiffer, and his wife Judy, and challenged by Random House editor Robert Loomis, she wrote her first autobiography, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, published in 1969. This brought her international recognition and acclaim; and

**WHEREAS**, Dr. Angelou's Chronology of autobiographies includes:

- *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1969): *Up to 1944 (age 17)*
- *Gather Together in My Name* (1974): *1944–48*
- *Singin' and Swingin' and Gettin' Merry Like Christmas* (1976): *1949–55*
- *The Heart of a Woman* (1981): *1957–62*
- *All God's Children Need Traveling Shoes* (1986): *1962–65*
- *A Song Flung Up to Heaven* (2002): *1965–68*
- Mom & Me & Mom* (2013): *overview; and*

**WHEREAS**, Angelou's long and extensive career also included poetry, plays, screenplays for television and film, directing, acting, and public speaking. She was a prolific writer of poetry; her volume, *Just Give Me a Cool Drink of Water 'fore I Die* (1971) was nominated for the Pulitzer Prize, and President Bill Clinton chose her to recite her poem "*On the Pulse of Morning*" during his inauguration in 1993. Angelou's successful acting career included roles in numerous plays, films, and television programs, including her appearance in the television mini-series *Roots* in 1977. Her screenplay, *Georgia, Georgia* (1972), was the first original script by a black woman to be produced, and she was the first African-American woman to direct a major motion picture, *Down in the Delta*, in 1998; and

**WHEREAS**, Jacob Morris presented before the Transportation, Landmarks, and Historic Preservation Committee on June 11th, 2024 where the Committee voted in-support of the street co-naming; and



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**WHEREAS**, The Executive Committee voted on August 21st, 2024 to support the resolution; and, the full Manhattan Community Board 10 voted on October 2nd, 2024 to unanimously support the resolution with 34 votes; and

***NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED***, that Manhattan Community Board 10 strongly and unequivocally recommends the commemoration of the distinguished and renowned legacy of Dr. Maya Angelou by honoring her through the co-naming of West 120th Street between Malcolm X Boulevard and 5th Avenue to Dr. Maya Angelou Place.