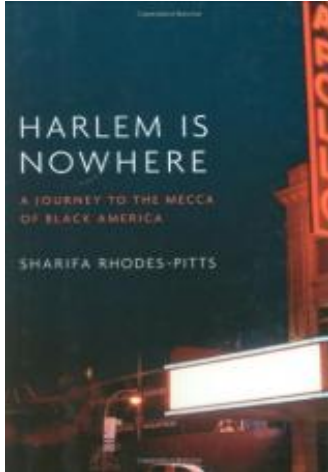


# Harlem is Nowhere: A Journey to the Mecca of Black America

by Sharifa Rhodes-Pitts

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## About the Book

For a century Harlem has been celebrated as the capital of black America, a thriving center of cultural achievement and political action. At a crucial moment in Harlem's history, as gentrification encroaches, Sharifa Rhodes-Pitts untangles the myth and meaning of Harlem's legacy. Examining the epic Harlem of official history and the personal Harlem that begins at her front door, Rhodes-Pitts introduces us to a wide variety of characters, past and present. At the heart of their stories, and her own, is the hope carried over many generations, hope that Harlem would be the ground from which blacks fully entered America's democracy.

Sharifa Rhodes-Pitts is a brilliant new voice who, like other significant chroniclers of places-Joan Didion on California, or Jamaica Kincaid on Antigua-captures the very essence of her subject.

## Discussion Guide

1. What do you think of when you hear the word "Harlem"? What does the neighborhood represent to you? How did this book change or confirm your initial impression?
2. In **Harlem is Nowhere**, the neighborhood is presented as having been both a place of great hope and a place that limited the possibilities of its inhabitants. Discuss this contradiction.
3. What do you make of Sharifa Rhodes-Pitts's personal interactions with neighbors who share aspects of their life story, dreams, and obsessions with her? How do you feel about her as a narrator?
4. The book quotes Alain Locke, who stated in 1925 that the cultural boom in Harlem was "the Negro's latest thrust toward democracy." In an era when Americans have elected a black president, do you think neighborhoods like Harlem

are still of value? Why or why not? If they should be preserved, how is this possible?

5. The author describes her relationship with various novels, poems, and photographs depicting Harlem, and the relation of those "imaginary" Harlems to what she found upon arriving. How does the book construct its own image of Harlem?

## Author Bio

Sharifa Rhodes-Pitts's pieces have appeared in the *New York Times Magazine*, *The Nation*, *the Boston Globe*, *Transition*, and other periodicals. She has received a Lannan Foundation Writing Residency Fellowship and the Rona Jaffe Foundation Writers' Award, and she was a Fulbright Scholar for 2006-2007. Rhodes-Pitts was born in Texas and educated at Harvard University. **Harlem Is Nowhere** is her first book.

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