



February 25, 2021

Hon. Bill de Blasio  
Mayor, City of New York  
City Hall  
New York, NY 10007

Hon. Sarah Carroll  
Chair, NYC Landmarks Preservation Commission  
One Centre Street, 9<sup>th</sup> floor  
New York, NY 10007

### Re: Unprotected Landmarks of Women's History, South of Union Square

Dear Mayor de Blasio and Chair Carroll,

As we enter Women's History Month, I write to call to your attention multiple sites of tremendous significance to women's history which we have previously submitted to the Landmarks Preservation Commission for consideration for landmark designation, but which the City has thus far refused to act upon. All remain without protection, and thus are vulnerable to demolition and loss, and all are located within our [proposed South of Union Square Historic District](#). As we celebrate the history and contributions of women in our city, I strongly urge you to reconsider your prior rejection of these and other sites for landmark designation. They include:

- **10 East 14<sup>th</sup> Street:** Beginning in 1894, this was the headquarters of the **New York City Woman Suffrage League**, which helped lead the campaign for a Constitutional Amendment Campaign to change the New York State Constitution to give women the right to vote. Leading suffragists including Lillie Devereux Blake, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and Harriet Stanton Blatch, among many others, were involved with the League and its campaigns.
- **17 East 13<sup>th</sup> Street:** home of trailblazing feminist writer **Anais Nin** and her Gemor Press, from which she hand printed and produced some her most important works.
- **80 Fifth Avenue:** Among the many layers of historic and architectural significance of this building, it housed the **International Worker's Order (IWO)**, a fraternal society, which became the **first insurer to include contraception in its benefits package**. A forerunner in the movement for prepaid medical care, the IWO offered its members primary care and contraceptive services for annual flat fees. Founded at a time when the legal status of contraception was precarious, the IWO's Birth Control Center was the only such clinic to operate on an insurance system.
- **64-66 Fifth Avenue :** Housed **Martha Graham's first dance studio**. Martha Graham has been called "the Picasso of dance" and "a prime revolutionary in the arts of this century and the American dancer and choreographer whose name became synonymous with modern dance" by *The New York Times*. This great American modern dance innovator had her first dance studio here beginning in the 1930s, remaining here through at least the 1950s. The studio

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(top) 10 East 14<sup>th</sup> Street, Lillie Devereaux Blake; 17 East 13<sup>th</sup> Street, Anais Nin  
 (middle) 80 Fifth Avenue, Birth Control Review; 64-66 Fifth Avenue, Martha Graham  
 (bottom) 55 Fifth Avenue, Billie Holiday; 80 University Place, Dr. Elizabeth Blackwell





(top) 86 University Place, Audre Lorde; 88 East 10<sup>th</sup> Street, Selma Hortense Burke  
 (middle) 814 Broadway, Nan Goldin slideshow; 51 Fifth Avenue, Jane Freilicher  
 (bottom) Albert Hotel, Joni Mitchell; 70 Fifth Avenue, Zora Neale Hurston

started off as an all-female dance company, and it was while located here that Graham first integrated men into her work and school. The Martha Graham Dance Company, founded in 1926, is known for being the oldest American dance company.

- **55 Fifth Avenue:** the former home of Columbia Records Studio, it was here that **Billie Holiday** made her very first recordings. Other great female musical artists including **Bessie Smith** also recorded here. Additionally, Norton published **Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique***, considered by many the beginning of second Wave Feminism in America and one of the most important works of 20<sup>th</sup> century non-fiction, while located here.
- **80 University Place:** the home and first office of **Dr. Elizabeth Blackwell**, the first woman doctor in America and profoundly influential public health pioneer.
- **86 University Place:** former home of the Bagatelle, frequented and written about by feminist and lesbian writers **Audre Lorde** and **Ann Bannon**. Additionally, for a decade and a half it was the home of leading 19<sup>th</sup> century New York philanthropist Benjamin Hazard Field and his wife Catherine M. Van Cortlandt de Peyster. Field was among the founders and initial benefactors of the first women's library in New York, and served as trustee for the Working Women's Protective Union. Founded in 1863, the Union's mission was to protect working women by providing legal protection from unscrupulous employers.
- **88 East 10<sup>th</sup> Street:** former home and studio of trailblazing African American sculptor and educator **Selma Hortense Burke**, who created some of her most important works here.
- **814 Broadway:** This building housed the **Women's Central Association of Relief (WCAR)** during the Civil War. **Elizabeth Blackwell**, an ardent abolitionist and the first female physician in the United States, established the WCAR in response to the Union Army's need for a system for distributing supplies, organizing four thousand women into the organization. The WCAR grew into chapters around the country, and systematically collected and distributed life-saving supplies such as bandages, blankets, food, clothing and medical supplies. By July 1861, the WCAR prompted the government to form a national version—the United States Sanitary Commission, which was the precursor to the **American Red Cross**. Additionally, beginning in the late 1960s, U-P Film Group and O-P Screening Room Cinema were also located here, which was the first venue to show feminist photographer **Nan Goldin's** slideshows.
- **51 Fifth Avenue:** Home and studio of celebrated artist **Jane Freilicher**, whose paintings frequently depicted scenes visible from her vantage point here. Freilicher was one of the very few women to emerge from and be a part of the "New York School" of artists in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, which shifted the center of the art world from Paris to New York.
- **The Hotel Albert, 23 East 10<sup>th</sup> Street:** One of the premiere gathering spots for artists, musicians, and writers in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, among the many luminaries known to have spent substantial time during their creative careers here were prominent female artists including **Joni Mitchell**, **Carly Simon**, **Diane DiPrima**, **Anais Nin**, and **the Mamas and the Papas**.
- **70 Fifth Avenue** (calendared but not heard): former headquarters of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, founded by renowned women's rights and peace activist **Crystal Eastman**, and the Woman's Peace Party, led by **Jane Addams**, **Carrie Chapman Catt**, and **Fanny Garrison Villard**. It was also the home to *The Crisis* Magazine, the first African American magazine ever published. *The Crisis* had a notable commitment to gender equality, providing leadership roles to women and showcasing the works of many female writers and artists. Led by literary editor **Jessie Redmon Fauset**, "the midwife of the Harlem Renaissance," *The Crisis* published works by





(top) 45 University Place, Lillian Wald; 61 Fourth Avenue, performers at the Reuben Gallery  
 (middle) 4 East 12<sup>th</sup> Street, Betty Waldo Parish etching; 40-56 University Place, Agnes de Mille  
 (bottom) 30 East 14<sup>th</sup> Street, Virginia Admiral; 48 Third Avenue/ 95 East 10<sup>th</sup> Street, Elaine de Kooning





(top) 34 East 10<sup>th</sup> Street, Valerie Bettis; 6 East 12<sup>th</sup> Street, Jessie Franklin Turner gown  
 (middle) 40-50 East 10<sup>th</sup> Street, Dawn Powell; 12 East 12<sup>th</sup> Street, Ronnie Spector, Patti Smith  
 (bottom) Chaka Khan; former St. Denis Hotel (demolished 2019), New York Radical Women demonstration at Miss America Pageant in Atlantic City, 1968

emerging female writers like **Zora Neale Hurston** and **Alice Dunbar-Nelson**. Executive Editor W.E.B. DuBois made his support for women's writes explicit in his political writings as well; in 1911 in the pages of *The Crisis* he wrote that "Every argument for Negro suffrage is an argument for women's suffrage; every argument for women's suffrage is an argument for Negro suffrage." At 70 Fifth Avenue **Elizabeth Ross Haynes' *Unsung Heroes*** (1921) was also published, a book about "the lives of seventeen men and women of the Negro race told in a way to inspire the children of our time" including **Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth, and Phillis Wheatley**.

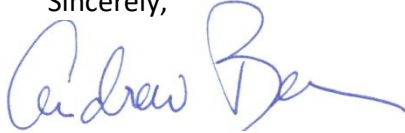
- **45 University Place:** home in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries of the **Social Reform Club**, one of the most prominent organizations of its time advocating for reform of social and industrial conditions for New Yorkers. Among the who's who of leading reformers involved with the club, which was dedicated to improving the lot of women in the workplace and in society, was **Lillian Wald**.
- **61 Fourth Avenue:** Home of the groundbreaking **Reuben Gallery**, founded by **Anita Reuben**, which introduced multi-media performances into the world of art with its "Happenings."
- **4 East 12<sup>th</sup> Street:** Home and studio of artist **Betty Waldo Parish**.
- **40-56 University Place:** Home of celebrated dancer, choreographer, and American Theater Hall of Fame-inductee **Agnes de Mille**.
- **30 East 14<sup>th</sup> Street:** Home and studio of artist **Virginia Admiral**
- **48 Third Avenue/95 East 10<sup>th</sup> Street:** Housed the March Gallery, home of the radical avant-garde NO!art movement, which helped launch the career of artist **Elaine de Kooning**.
- **34 East 10<sup>th</sup> Street:** Home to the studio of celebrated dance pioneer **Valerie Bettis**, the first modern dancer to choreograph for a ballet company.
- **6 East 12<sup>th</sup> Street:** Home and showroom of designer and couturier **Jessie Franklin Turner**, who led the emergence of the high-fashion industry in the United States, from its genesis in New York during the First World War to the flowering of global influence exerted by Hollywood in the thirties and forties. Also the home and studio of Abstract Expressionist painter **Rosemarie Beck**.
- **38-58 East 10<sup>th</sup> Street:** home of writers **Dawn Powell** and **Candace Bushnell**.
- **12 East 12<sup>th</sup> Street:** Home of RPM Studios, one of New York's premiere boutique recording studios, where artists including Suzanne Vega, Aimee Mann, Cassandra Wilson, Meshell Ndegeocello, and Lauryn Hill made their first prominent recordings, while other female artists including Whitney Houston, Mary J. Blige, Natalie Merchant, Vanessa Williams, The Roches, Diana Krall, Norah Jones, Patti Smith, Donna Summer, Dee Dee Bridgewater, Sade, Diana Ross, Ronnie Spector, Nona Hendricks, Chaka Khan, Roseanne Cash, and Martina McBride also recorded some of their most noted works.

This district [South of Union Square](#), which saw a unique confluence of progressive politics, art, and commerce, had a particularly high concentration of pioneering women and organizations dedicated to advancing the cause of women's equality. It should be noted that within this proposed historic district we have already lost the former **St. Denis Hotel at 799 Broadway/80 East 11<sup>th</sup> Street**, where suffragist Susan B. Anthony spoke to fellow women suffragists, trailblazing actress Sarah Bernhardt stayed, and where New York Radical Women, an early second-wave feminist group inspired by the contemporary civil rights and anti-Vietnam War movements but frustrated by the marginalization of women within those movements, was located. One of the group's first actions was a women's anti-Vietnam War march in Washington D.C. in 1968, called the Jeannette Rankin Brigade, and it is best known for its protest of the Miss America pageant in Atlantic City later that year.



This vital history of our city and country, acknowledging the struggles and accomplishments of women, remains unrecognized and unprotected. I strongly urge you to reassess prior decisions and to consider these sites, and the entire proposed [South of Union Square Historic District](#), for landmark designation.

Sincerely,



Andrew Berman  
Executive Director

Cc: Borough President Gale Brewer  
City Council Speaker Corey Johnson  
City Councilmember Carlina Rivera  
State Senator Brad Hoylman  
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