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Hon. Sarah Carroll, Chair
NYC Landmarks Commission
1 Centre Street, 9th Floor
New York, NY 10007

Re: Support for the landmark designation of 50 West 13th Street, home of Jacob Day and theater where the Afro-American Folkloric Troupe performed regularly in 1968

Dear Chair Carroll,

As the author of the novel *Harlem Mosaics*, I am writing to express my strong support for the effort by Village Preservation to secure landmark status for 50 West 13th Street. *Harlem Mosaics* is based on the great Harlem Renaissance writers Zora Neale Hurston and Langston Hughes, and includes an introduction by Marc Primus, who founded the Afro-American Folkloric Troupe and produced the work of Hurston and Hughes. 50 West 13th Street is significant as housing the theater where this groundbreaking troupe performed regularly in 1968.

In addition to Marc Primus, the Afro-American Folkloric Troupe was led by Norman Jacobs, Charles C. Thomas and Stella Beck, and performed primarily for Black audiences until 1971. The group showcased the recorded words of Black poets and folklorists such as James Weldon Johnson, Gwendolyn Brooks, Amiri Baraka (then LeRoi Jones), Langston Hughes, and Zora Neale Hurston. According to Primus in the introduction to *Harlem Mosaics*, Hughes began sending his unpublished work to the Troupe as early as 1962. As described in the July-August 1965 issue of *Black Dialogue*, all of the members of the Troupe were “intensely interested in the study of Black History – Afro American and African.” The group also had a deep interest in raising “Black public consciousness,” concerned as they were “with what Black People have been, what they think they have been; who they think they are, who they actually are, and what they may become.”

Decades earlier, between 1858 and 1884, before 50 West 13th Street was converted to a theater, Jacob Day owned and resided at this same building. Day was one of New York’s most successful African American businessmen, a prominent abolitionist, and a dedicated supporter of the historic Abyssinian Baptist Church, then located nearby in Greenwich Village. Jacob Day was also likely a supporter of the Underground Railroad — quite possibly assisting from this very surviving home. This history further emphasizes the significance of

50 West 13th Street: one of few sites remaining in Greenwich Village connected to the African American leaders and institutions located here in the 19th century, a time when this neighborhood was the center of African American life in New York and home to its largest African American community. For all these reasons, I strongly urge you to move ahead with consideration of landmark designation of 50 West 13th Street.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Whit Frazier Peterson", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Whit Frazier Peterson
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