



*Testimony in Support of the Proposed Designation of the
Audre Lorde Residence, 207 St. Paul's Avenue, Staten Island,
as a New York City Landmark*

Tuesday, June 4, 2019

My name is Amanda Davis and I am the project manager of the NYC LGBT Historic Sites Project, a cultural heritage initiative founded by historic preservationists in 2015 to document historic places connected to the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender community in the city's five boroughs.

The Project strongly supports the designation of the Audre Lorde Residence as a New York City Landmark. First, it is important to recognize that LGBT history exists outside of Manhattan. Our Project is actively documenting and conducting outreach so that LGBT historic sites in the Bronx, Brooklyn, Queens, and on Staten Island are represented on our website. This is particularly meaningful to public school students we have been working with, through a grant from the city's Department of Education, when they learn that LGBT history exists near them.

Audre Lorde's life and work continues to resonate long after her death. In our current political climate, with women's rights under threat, a photo of her next to a blackboard that reads, "Women are powerful and dangerous," and her quote, "Your silence will not protect you," are just two of Lorde's legacies that have become heavily associated with the modern day women's movement. Lorde, of course, had an important role in several fights for equality -- civil rights, LGBT, and women's -- and her activist work and her role as an educator largely took place during her time in this house on Staten Island.

As a gifted writer, Lorde was also influential outside her home borough. Her written accounts of visiting lesbian bars in pre-Stonewall Greenwich Village, such as the Bagatelle and the Pony Stable Inn, provide an invaluable record of the discrimination black lesbians faced from bar staff and, in some cases, from white lesbian patrons. In her book *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*, which she wrote while living on Staten Island, she recalled, "It was hard enough to be Black, to be Black and female, to be Black, female, and gay. To be Black, female, gay, and out of the closet in a white environment, even to the extent of dancing in the Bagatelle, was considered by many Black lesbians to be simply suicidal." Lorde was also an influential figure in the city's lesbian community. She was involved with the Salsa Soul Sisters, the nation's oldest black lesbian organization, which met regularly in a Greenwich Village church to discuss issues of importance to lesbians of color. Lorde was also involved with the Lesbian Herstory Archives, founded in the early 1970s and still in existence in Park Slope, Brooklyn. The Audre Lorde Project, founded in 1994, is a community center in Brooklyn that builds on Lorde's legacy of speaking out for oppressed and marginalized groups.

Official landmarks associated with the significant contributions of women of color in our city are much too few in number. Designating the Audre Lorde Residence a New York City Landmark would be an important step that we hope to see continue.