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WEST HARLEM FIGHTS FOR ACCESS TO RIVERSIDE PARK

OPENING THE FLOODGATES

Please do Savona Bailey-McClain a favor. Board a No. 1 train bound for West Harlem, disembark at 155th Street, and then try and walk down to Riverside Park. The park, which stretches ten blocks south and three blocks north, is easily visible from Broadway, but blocking the way to actually getting there is Riverside Drive, a steep and overgrown hillside, various Amtrak rail lines, and six lanes of clamorous traffic on the Henry Hudson Parkway. In addition, there is only one foot crossing at 148th Street. For locals, the park is more mirage than oasis.

Now, reboard a downtown train at 145th Street. Get off at any stop between 125th Street and 72nd Street. There lies an entirely different park, where the tracks run underground, the highway runs along the river, and there are one or more entrances on almost every block. For Bailey-McClain, founder and executive director of the West Harlem Arts Fund, the message is clear. "The city didn't invest in these kind of amenities because they didn't think it was important for the people uptown," she said.

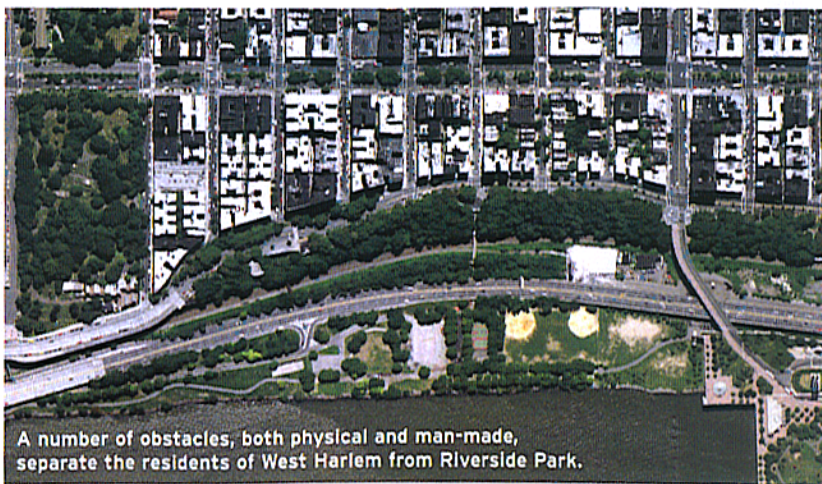
Over the past few years, the West Harlem Art Fund has been hard at work righting this imbalance through a project known as Take Me to the River. Begun

in earnest in 2005 when Manhattan Borough President C. Virginia Fields secured a \$75,000 grant from the state's Division of Coastal Resources, the first phase involved the creation of a concept plan. Developed through intensive community review process, the planners—New York firms Nautilus International Development Consulting and Donna Walcavage Landscape Architecture + Urban Design—determined that residents of Harlem desired not only access to the park but also improved access throughout the

neighborhood, including a more active and cultural streetscape.

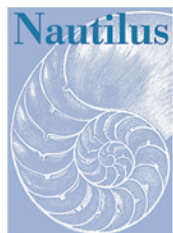
Last year, the art fund received an additional \$475,000 grant from the state, which is going towards a broader design for the project, due for completion this summer. With the help of Manhattan Borough President Scott Stringer—he is fond of saying that without access, the park "might as well be on the moon"—an RFP was released last fall, drawing 13 entrants, including such major firms as ARUP and HOK. The winner, however, was the Nautilus team, announced on January 11. "It just feels like we're back home," said Nautilus principal Bonnie Harken.

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A number of obstacles, both physical and man-made, separate the residents of West Harlem from Riverside Park.

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