For the first half of the twentieth century, this U Street neighborhood inspired and sustained the rich social, civic, and cultural life of Washington’s African American community.

Follow this trail to the places that tell the story of this exceptional community in the heart of the nation’s capital.
Welcome.

Visitors to Washington, D.C. flock to the National Mall, where grand monuments symbolize the nation’s highest ideals. This walking tour invites you to deepen your experience of the nation’s capital by discovering the places where people in the Shaw/U Street neighborhood — for half a century the heart of African American business and culture in Washington — worked to make those ideals a reality.

Adjacent to the famed Howard University, this neighborhood was home to Duke Ellington, leading African American artists and professionals, and a thriving black community of churches, schools, and social and civic organizations. Here people of color responded with strength to the injustices of segregation, engaging in some of the nation’s first civil rights protests while simultaneously building a vibrant urban center of their own —“a city within a city.”
As you walk the trail, please be aware that you are traveling through an urban environment. Keep your safety and personal security in mind, just as you would while visiting an unfamiliar place in any city.
Until 1920, when New York’s Harlem overtook it, Washington, D.C. could claim the largest urban African American population in the United States. The U Street area provided the heartbeat. It inspired and nurtured the elegance and the musical genius of Duke Ellington. Leaders in science, law, education, and the arts — such as Thurgood Marshall, Dr. Charles Drew, Langston Hughes, and the opera star Madame Evanti — walked these streets and lifted the aspirations of its families.

This neighborhood lies within the area laid out by Pierre L’Enfant for the federal city in 1791. By the time of the Civil War 70 years later, however, it was still open land dotted with a few frame buildings. Two Civil War camps and a hospital brought the first major activity to the area. In 1867, Howard University began to rise nearby, the first such southern institution to welcome African Americans.

After the war, public streetcars began to run north from downtown into this area, opening it for residential development. Craftsmen and builders, government employees, professionals and working people, black and white, moved into the houses you see today. Almost all of these fine brick homes were built between 1870 and 1900, making this neighborhood an outdoor museum of late Victorian rowhouse architecture. Smaller houses lined hidden alleys in the larger blocks, where people of few means could afford to live.

The neighborhood attracted some of the leading African American intellectuals of the day, as well as families of all economic levels, some descended from Washington’s large pre-Civil War free black community. As racial segregation tightened in the late 19th century, the neighborhood became the heart of black Washington. Former residents remember that part of the strength of this community was the mixture of people from all walks of life who lived side-by-side — laborers, craftsmen, government employees, and professors — who, despite their differences, created a viable community that supported its people and inspired its youth.

By 1920, more than 300 black businesses clustered in this vicinity, and U Street became the community’s boulevard. Three first-run movie theaters, nightclubs and ballrooms, poolhalls and stores operated alongside the offices of black doctors, dentists, and lawyers. In the 1930s and 1940s, the likes of Cab Calloway, Pearl Bailey, Sarah Vaughn, Jelly Roll Morton, and native son Duke Ellington played on and around U Street, and hung out at after-hours clubs in a scene so full of magic that it was dubbed Washington’s
“Black Broadway.” Evenings and weekends, U Street was the place to be, especially Easter Sunday and Halloween, when it became a parade ground. On Sundays the community gathered in scores of churches, where generations had worshipped in congregations that dated back to the Civil War.

Many of the buildings that provided the setting for the grand balls, civil rights gatherings, religious services, and business affairs of this community were financed, designed and built by and for African Americans, an extraordinary phenomenon in the early 20th century. Four major black architects — W. Sidney Pittman, Isaiah T. Hatton, John A. Lankford, and Charles I. Cassell — worked in this area. Their achievements can be seen in the structures that housed the nation’s first African American YMCA; the city’s oldest black bank; the earliest first-class African American hotel in Washington; a historic Masonic lodge; and a business, civic, and social center built by the Order of True Reformers. All have been restored to their original grandeur, as has the Lincoln Theatre, touted by the *Washington Bee* upon its opening in 1923 as “perhaps the finest and largest theater for Colored people in the world.”

The neighborhood began to change in the 1950s when the end of legal segregation opened new housing opportunities for African Americans and many chose to leave for newer, less crowded places. Then the 1968 riots following the death of Martin Luther King, Jr., which began at 14th and U, marked the neighborhood as unsafe. Today the neighborhood is experiencing a renaissance, sparked by the construction of the Reeves Municipal Center in 1986, connections to the city’s Metrorail system in 1991, a revival of local nightclubs and restaurants, and renewed interest in the neighborhood’s historic buildings. The African American Civil War Memorial at Tenth and U is drawing visitors from around the nation. Restored as a lively center of community life, the neighborhood is now shared by people of all races who honor its legacy.

Kathryn S. Smith
*Executive Director*
Cultural Tourism DC
Washington’s historic black Broadway was the heart of African American life in Washington, D.C. from about 1900 to the 1950s. Duke Ellington, its most famous native son, grew up, was inspired, trained, and played his first music here. He is but one example of the leaders in law, medicine, the military, science, and the arts who were shaped by a community that valued education and supported achievement against great odds in a segregated society. At the eastern edge of the neighborhood stands Howard University, its guiding star throughout many generations.

The Lincoln Theatre at 1215 U Street, now restored to its 1922 grandeur, was one of three first-run movie theaters clustered on U Street. The Lincoln Colonnade behind the theater, since demolished, was a popular setting for balls, parties and performances. All the great entertainers played clubs on or near this boulevard — Cab Calloway, Pearl Bailey, Sarah Vaughn, Louis Armstrong, Billy Eckstine, and Jelly Roll Morton, to name a few.

Black-owned entertainment venues and professional businesses including the offices of black lawyers, doctors, and dentists, and the headquarters of black social institutions, all clustered along U Street. Many of them occupied buildings that were financed and built by and for African Americans, an unusual phenomenon at the time.

At night and on weekends, U Street was a parade ground — a place to meet friends and share what many describe as a close, small-town atmosphere. And at its core was an elegance epitomized by Duke Ellington himself. The old-timers of the neighborhood said that U Street was so grand that to come here “you had to wear a tie.”
A social group called The Dozen chose the True Reformer Building as the site for this formal dinner about 1917. Adelaide J. Robinson

The True Reformer Building

12TH AND U STREETS NW

The daily lives of residents of this historic African American community were often woven together through hundreds of social and civic organizations — fraternal organizations, clubs, school alumni associations, civic associations and the like. The grand, five-story, Italianate building at the southwest corner of 12th and U Streets, known as the True Reformers Hall and later the Pythian Temple, was the setting for many of their activities. Completed in 1903, it was among the grandest buildings in the nation to have been designed, built, and financed by African Americans.

The United Order of True Reformers, based in Richmond, Virginia, provided insurance and other benefits to its members. The organization built this lavish building in a prominent place in the nation’s capital to symbolize the achievements of African Americans. It was designed by John A. Lankford, the city’s first registered African American architect, who went on to national prominence. In 1906, Lankford said, being in Washington, it stands out to the civilized world as an example of what the Negro can do and has done with his brain, skill, and money.”

Duke Ellington played one of his first paid performances with his own band in a room designated number five within the building. Its lofty second-floor auditorium provided the setting for debutante balls, sorority and fraternity dances, plays, and, from 1938, for basketball and other activities of the Police Boys Club No. 2. The First Separate Battalion, an African American reserve unit that served with distinction in World War I, drilled on the ground floor.

Today it is home to the Public Welfare Foundation, which shares the original mission of the True Reformers in dedicating itself to the well-being of people and communities in need.
Black businesses sprang up everywhere on U Street in the early 1900s. As racial segregation increased, African Americans in Washington began a tradition of protest. They also responded by creating institutions of their own. Amazingly, in the 25 years from 1895 to 1920, the number of black-owned businesses in this area skyrocketed from about 15 to more than 300. They all clustered around U Street.

John Whitelaw Lewis led the way in a true rags to riches story. Arriving in Washington with few resources in 1896, he took a job as a brick carrier. He soon organized his co-workers into a building and loan association, and in 1913 it became the Industrial Savings Bank, located at 11th and U Streets. Reorganized by Jesse Mitchell in the 1930s, it continues in his family today as one of the oldest black financial institutions in the nation.

The bank building, and the building across the street at 2001 11th Street, were both financed by John Whitelaw Lewis and designed by black architect Isaiah T. Hatton in 1919 and 1922, respectively. The Bohemian Caverns of today is a revival of a long tradition on this spot. The Crystal Caverns began here in 1926, giving way to the Club Caverns, and then the Bohemian Caverns in the 1960s — a setting for the music of John Coltrane, Miles Davis, Cannonball Adderley, and Ramsey Lewis, among many others. The Ramsey Lewis Trio recorded the popular album, In Crowd, here.

These and other black-owned businesses created a world unto itself. Those who remember say, “We had everything we needed right here.”
THE CARDozo SHAW NEIGHBORHOOD and the Greater U Street Historic District are rich in African American and Civil War history. The area is the ideal place for the African American Civil War Memorial now located at the intersection of Tenth and U Streets and Vermont Avenue. The neighborhood is named for Robert Gould Shaw, the white commander of the 54th Massachusetts Regiment, an African American unit featured in the celebrated film *Glory*.

When the first shots of the Civil War were fired, this entire area north of Washington’s downtown was still woods and open fields, with a few small wooden houses scattered about. The Union command chose this area for some of the city’s major military encampments — Campbell Hospital at Sixth and Florida Avenue, the Wisewell Barracks at Seventh and P Streets, and Camp Barker near 13th and R Streets. These camps were safe havens for freedmen fleeing the South, and some chose to stay and make their homes in the area.

After the war, as the city’s population mushroomed, public streetcars began to run north from downtown through this neighborhood, opening it up for development. From the 1870s to 1900, builders filled its residential streets with the Italianate, Second Empire, and Queen Anne-style rowhouses that characterize the neighborhood today. Blacks and whites built and lived in this neighborhood, which became predominantly African American between 1900 and 1920.

The Most Worshipful Prince Hall Grand Lodge at 1000 U Street, a large building adjacent to the African American Civil War Memorial, was designed by the prominent African American architect Albert I. Cassell in 1922, and continues to be a center of civic and social activity.
To the north and east of the U Street corridor rises the tower of Founders Library at Howard University — an institution created in 1867 that has trained and inspired generations of African American leaders and has been a lodestar for its own community.

The highest value was placed on educational achievement in this historic neighborhood. Divisions 10 through 13 of the DC Public Schools, the “colored schools” as they were known in pre-1954 segregated Washington, were considered the best in the nation. Teachers were looked up to as community leaders, mentors, and role models.

The former Grimke Elementary School, the Colonial Revival structure just south of U Street on Vermont Avenue, was part of this system. It was named for Archibald Grimke, born to a slave mother and a white father, who became a prominent Washington lawyer and civil rights leader. Garnet-Patterson Junior High School, still a center of community activity, is located today on Vermont Avenue between U and V Streets. All of the city’s high schools for African Americans were located in this vicinity.

Among the achievers in this community was Lillian Evans Tibbs, known professionally as Madame Evanti — the first internationally known African American opera singer. She lived in the house at 1910 Vermont Avenue. The grand space at Tenth and U Streets was a gathering place for the community, with Sunday concerts held in a bandstand where the African American Civil War Memorial is now located.
The Thurgood Marshall Center for Service and Heritage occupies the historic Italian Renaissance-style building of the former 12th Street YMCA at 1816 12th Street, known after 1972 as the Anthony Bowen YMCA.

It was the first African American YMCA in the nation, formed in 1853 by Anthony Bowen, a former slave who became a civic leader in the nation’s capital. This YMCA met in various places for decades until it raised $100,000 to build this structure between 1907 and 1912. The architect was W. Sidney Pittman, one of America’s first African American architects, and the son-in-law of Booker T. Washington. President Theodore Roosevelt laid the cornerstone in 1908.

The 12th Street YMCA became a community center for black Washingtonians across the city. It was a place to play sports, learn to swim, meet friends, start organizations and mobilize for a cause, including important civil rights initiatives. For many, including travelers to segregated Washington, the Y dormitories were a home away from home.

Poet Langston Hughes lived here in the early 1920s. Dr. Charles Drew, who pioneered the preservation of blood plasma, was an active member. The basketball skills of Coach John Thompson of Georgetown University were discovered here, and boxing-champion Joe Louis was a frequent visitor.

Today, the building houses the U Street/Shaw Heritage Museum and Exhibition Center and an array of nonprofit organizations that make it, once again, a center of community activity. It is named for Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall, who met here with colleagues to develop legal strategies for the landmark 1954 Brown v. Board of Education civil rights case.
Churches have deep roots in the life of this historic African American community. A number of the congregations in the immediate area, including the Lincoln Temple United Church of Christ on this corner and Vermont Avenue Baptist Church nearby, date back to the Civil War. At the time, Union soldiers at Camp Barker at 13th and R Streets and at the Wisewell Barracks at Seventh and P Streets offered protection and assistance for freedmen fleeing the South.

These churches are a fraction of the religious institutions to be found everywhere in this neighborhood — in storefronts, in grand buildings with nineteenth-century towers and spires, and in modern structures. In addition to serving as places of worship, they have been and continue to be centers of community activity.

They have been filled with music, not only by church choirs, but by such internationally known artists as Leontyne Price and Roland Hayes. The ministers and members of neighborhood churches have also always been in the forefront of the struggle for equal rights. Strategy meetings, lectures, and rallies have most often found a base of operations in church basements and Sunday School rooms.

The families of the neighborhood developed deep ties, sometimes for generations, with other families in these churches, and there was much visiting back and forth between the congregations. These relationships were further repeated and deepened in the schools. One old-timer put it this way — “It was like a village.”
The elegant Whitelaw Hotel at the corner of 13th and T Streets opened its doors in 1919, offering African American travelers their first opportunity to stay in a first-class hotel in the segregated nation’s capital. Inside they found a lobby with fine rugs and potted palms, a richly decorated dining room, comfortable rooms, and convenience shops on the first floor.

The Whitelaw was the creation of African American business entrepreneur John Whitelaw Lewis, who also built the Industrial Bank building on U Street. A former construction worker turned developer and financier, he hired a black builder and Isaiah T. Hatton, a black architect, to make the hotel a reality. Its restaurant/ballroom was a favorite choice for elite dinner parties and dances. The clientele included many of the famous of the day — Cab Calloway, Joe Louis, and the neighborhood’s own native son, Edward Kennedy (Duke) Ellington.

Duke Ellington lived nearby from age 11 to 18 — at 1805 13th Street from 1910 to 1914, and across the street at 1816 13th Street from 1915 to 1917. While living here he chose music over baseball, soaking up the varied and rich musical traditions of the neighborhood. He was inspired by Dunbar High School music teacher Henry Grant, by traveling pianists, by church choirs, and by teachers at the Washington Conservatory of Music and School of Expression at Ninth and T Streets.

Ellington left for better opportunities in New York in 1923, but frequently returned to play the Howard Theatre and nightclubs in his old neighborhood, where his magnificent style made him the hometown favorite. The Whitelaw Hotel, where he sometimes stayed, has been converted into affordable apartments by Manna, Inc. Its ballroom has been restored to its former grandeur, and continues to be a community gathering place.
The Greater U Street Heritage Trail is composed of 14 illustrated historical markers, topped by an H, designed so that you can begin your journey at any point along the route. The walk should take about 90 minutes.

Easy starting points include either exit of the U Street/African American Civil War Memorial/Cardozo M Metrorail station on the Green Line.
Louis Armstrong and Sarah Vaughan were two of the nationally famous entertainers who played at a club at the northeast corner of 14th and T Streets, once the popular Club Bali, also called the New Bali. In the memory of one former customer, it was “a magic place,” its rear garden lit with strings of lights in the summertime.

Club Bali was one of many nightclubs that made the U Street area a mecca for music lovers from the jazz era of the 1920s to the Motown sound of the 1960s. The magic often continued late into the night, as name entertainers, winding down after formal engagements, played to intimate gatherings into the wee hours of the morning in the many tucked-away, after-hours clubs located throughout the neighborhood.

Fourteenth Street was a place shared, uneasily, by black and white Washingtonians in segregated Washington. Black and white people owned, managed, and patronized stores on this important commercial corridor, which both connected and divided the mostly black community on the east from the mostly white community on the west. While the white-owned People’s Drug Store at the corner of 14th and U refused to serve African Americans at the counter, most of the predominantly black clubs such as the Bali welcomed whites, making the nightclub scene in Washington one of the city’s few integrated social settings.

Both 14th Street and U Street are once again venues for the arts and nightlife, as theaters, restaurants, and clubs reuse this neighborhood’s historic buildings. Buildings that were once car showrooms are proving to be well suited to the needs of Washington’s innovative and thriving small theaters.
Strong Families and Eminent Citizens

The fine rowhouses in this neighborhood were once home to many of the community’s old families and most distinguished citizens.

Charles Hamilton Houston, a national leader in civil rights, was born one block south of here in the 1400 block of Swann Street. A prominent African American lawyer and Howard University professor, he worked with his most famous student, the future Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall, to develop the arguments that would end legal segregation in America. Marshall, who used these arguments to win the famous 1954 Brown v. Board of Education Supreme Court case, credited Houston with laying the groundwork for the modern civil rights movement.

The red-brick corner house at 1461 S Street was home to the African American poet Georgia Douglas Johnson, a writer associated with the flowering of African American literature and art in the 1920s and 1930s known as the New Negro (or Harlem) Renaissance. Every Saturday night Johnson opened her home to artists and writers, making it the heart of the Renaissance in Washington. Among her guests were writer Jean Toomer (author of Cane), the poet Langston Hughes, and Howard University professor Alain Locke, who first named and defined the Renaissance in his 1925 book, The New Negro.

This was also a neighborhood of strong families, many of whom had been in Washington for generations. Some traced their ancestry back to the city’s large pre-Civil War free black population. Noted African American photographer Addison Scurlock took their portraits and recorded their rites of passage on film — births, graduations, debutante parties, and weddings. His presence in the community was so strong that a local wag once said, “If he didn’t photograph your wedding, you weren’t married.”
Although Washington, D.C. has been a racially segregated city for much of its history, black and white Washingtonians have shared several parts of this neighborhood.

The modern building on the northeast corner of 15th and U Streets sits on the site of the Portner Flats, demolished in 1974. An elegant 1897 apartment building, the Portner was occupied by white residents until the end of World War II. Its grand public dining room and parlors, large, high-ceilinged apartments, and many resident services made it a sought-after address. Its elaborate drugstore entrance was a well-known landmark on the corner.

In 1945, the Portner Flats became the Dunbar Hotel, at one time the largest black hotel in the nation. It was named for poet Paul Laurence Dunbar, who once lived in the adjacent neighborhood of LeDroit Park. The hotel became a popular gathering place for famous sports and entertainment figures, Howard University faculty, and other black professionals.

At 15th and V Streets stands St. Augustine Catholic Church, the city’s oldest predominantly black Catholic congregation, founded in 1858 at 15th and L Streets. In 1961, the congregation took a dramatic step and merged with a white congregation, St. Paul’s Roman Catholic Church, and moved into its 1883 Gothic Revival building. You can see it just north of the old Dunbar Hotel site. For 20 years, until 1982, it was known as Sts. Paul and Augustine. Today it continues to actively welcome members of all races and ethnic groups.
The grand Beaux-Arts buildings in the vicinity of 16th and U Streets stand witness to the status of this area in early 20th-century Washington, and as tribute to the indomitable spirit of Mary Foote Henderson. She lived in a mansion at 16th and Florida Avenue and spent decades promoting 16th Street as “a prestige address.” In the 1890s, she was instrumental in having 16th Street extended into the undeveloped land north of here.

Developers followed, and in 1900 the Balfour Apartment building went up at 16th and U Streets at a cost of $100,000, making it one of the most expensive structures of its kind in the city. Designed by Washington architect George S. Cooper, it offered 36 large, luxurious apartments.

Prestigious apartments continued to spring up in this neighborhood, providing popular accommodations for congressmen, military personnel, and other federal government officials. The Northumberland, at 2039 New Hampshire Avenue, is a remarkably preserved example. Architect Albert H. Beers created its Renaissance-inspired design in 1909 for prolific Washington builder Harry Wardman. The building featured a public dining room, trash chutes from each kitchen, wall safes, and a telephone switchboard that operated 24 hours a day.

The impressive Beaux-Arts building on the northeast corner of 16th and U Streets was built in 1914 for the Congressional Club, founded in 1908 on another site as a non-partisan gathering place for the spouses of members of Congress. Mary Henderson provided the land, substantial construction funds, and her favorite architect, George Oakley Totten, Jr. He designed nine other mansions for Mary Henderson along 16th Street, which she rented to foreign embassies. She even encouraged the president of the United States to move to the area, but in that she did not succeed.
At the corner of 15th and Florida Avenue is one of the many entrances to Meridian Hill Park, a dramatic urban oasis established in 1912 and completed in 1936. Its stunning, 12-acre landscape features the longest cascading waterfall of its kind in North America, a grand promenade, and some of the city’s most interesting sculpture. Nationally known artists performed here from the 1930s into the 1970s, making it America’s first park for the performing arts. Pearl Bailey and Perle Mesta drew 20,000 people for “an evening of Pearls” in 1968.

The park was the inspiration of Mary Foote Henderson, the wife of Senator John B. Henderson, who lived in a Romanesque, castle-like mansion that once stood at the northwest corner of 16th and Florida Avenue. Horace W. Peaslee, the park’s designer, was inspired by the eighteenth-century gardens of Italy and France. The walls and walkways of the park represent the first use of exposed aggregate concrete anywhere in the world, here raised to the level of fine art by John Joseph Earley. The multi-colored stones are all from the Potomac River and are designed to shimmer in the light like an impressionist painting.

Situated between a predominantly white community on the west and a predominantly black community on the east, the park was a public space shared by both races in segregated Washington. Today the park, known to many as Malcom X Park, sits amidst the city’s most multicultural community and is again a gathering place and a setting for concerts and public programs.
The corner of 14th and U Streets has been a city crossroads, a neighborhood gathering place, and a stage set for events that have shaken the city and the nation.

For city residents, it was the transfer place for crosstown streetcars and buses. For the African American community, it was the heart of a business and professional downtown.

It has also been the fault line in the struggle for equal rights for black Americans in the 20th century. Some of the nation’s first picket lines walked this corner in the 1930s when the New Negro Alliance protested discrimination in hiring by local businesses. Among the protesters was Mary McLeod Bethune, founder of the National Council of Negro Women, educator, and advisor to four U.S. presidents. The 1938 United States Supreme Court decision that followed affirmed the constitutional rights that supported the sit-ins of the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s.

In April 1968, the corner was the flashpoint for riots that followed the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. The violent protest destroyed businesses along 14th Street, Seventh Street, and in other parts of the city. In 1986, the Frank D. Reeves Municipal Center rose where the riots had begun, and became both a symbol and a sparkplug for a neighborhood renaissance. New restaurants, shops, and nightclubs, a new subway stop, and the restoration of historic buildings followed, making U Street once again a lively urban community.
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Capitol Hill’s Navy Yard and Marine Barracks district is one of the city’s oldest. Hear the Marine Band rehearsing and explore historic Eastern Market.

Eastern Market to Sign 1.

3 **Battleground to Community: Brightwood**
Here, along the city’s first farm-to-market road, is where Union and Confederate troops met in the only Civil War battle to be fought in the District.

Georgia Ave-Petworth, 70-series Metrobuses north to Sign 2 at Madison St. and Georgia Ave., or Columbia Heights, 50-series Metrobuses north to Sign 1 at Colorado Ave., 14th and Jefferson Sts.

4 **Cultural Convergence: Columbia Heights**
Meet the old and new Columbia Heights and the people who changed our world with new technology, ideas, literature, laws, and leadership.

Columbia Heights to Sign 1.

5 **A Self-Reliant People: Greater Deanwood**
Wood-frame houses evoke this traditionally African American neighborhood’s rural past. See where Nannie Helen Burroughs and Marvin Gaye made their names.

Minnesota Ave. to Metrobus U8 (Capitol Heights) to Sign 1 at Division Ave. south of Nannie Helen Burroughs Ave.

6 **Civil War to Civil Rights: Downtown**
Follow the footsteps of Abraham Lincoln, Frederick Douglass, Walt Whitman, and the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., whose lives intertwined with the history of the nation. Download the free audio tour from CulturalTourismDC.org.

Archives-Navy Mem’l-Penn Quarter. Sign 1 on Seventh St. across Pennsylvania Ave.

7 **Village in the City: Mount Pleasant**
Trace the path from country village to fashionable street-car suburb, working-class neighborhood, Latino barrio, and hub of arts and activism.

Columbia Heights. Two blocks west to Sign 1 at 16th and Harvard Sts.

8 **Midcity at the Crossroads: Shaw**
Immigrants and old-timers, the powerful and the poor have mingled in Shaw since DC’s earliest days.

Mt. Vernon Square/7th St–Convention Center to Sign 12.

9 **River Farms to Urban Towers: Southwest**
Visualize historic, ethnic Southwest amid today’s now-classic Modernist architecture, the result of mid-20th-century urban renewal.

Waterfront-SEU to Sign 1.

10 **City Within a City: Greater U Street**
Discover the historic center of African American DC, where Duke Ellington got his inspiration, Madame Evanti composed, and Thurgood Marshall strategized.

U St/African-Amer Civil War Memorial / Cardozo. Sign 1 is at 13th St. exit.
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THE SIGHTS AND INFORMATION highlighted along this walking trail just begin to scratch the surface of the rich history of the Shaw neighborhood and its people. For more information, please consult the *Guide to the Historical Resources of Shaw*, by Kathryn S. Smith and Marya McQuirter, and other resources in the library of The Historical Society of Washington, D.C.; the Washingtoniana Division, D.C. Public Library; and any of the following selected works:


This trail lives and breathes because of the generosity of the many current and former Shaw residents who shared their memories in a series of neighborhood history projects in the late 1990s. In 1996, as part of the planning for the U Street/Shaw Heritage Museum and Exhibition Center at the Thurgood Marshall Center for Service and Heritage, almost 100 individuals participated in “remembering sessions” organized by Kathryn S. Smith and Marya McQuirter. Their memories are summarized and their names listed in *A Guide to the Historical Resources of Shaw*, available at local libraries.

This research led to the creation of a unique, 160-foot-long outdoor exhibit at 13th and U, “Remembering U Street,” that introduced passersby to the rich history of the neighborhood for more than two years beginning in 1997. A project of The Historical Society of Washington, D.C., led by Barbara Franco, it was co-sponsored by the Thurgood Marshall Center, the U Street Festival, and the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority; co-curated by Kathryn Smith and Marya McQuirter with the assistance of Henry P. Whitehead; designed and constructed by Terence Nicholson, James H. Johnson, and Julie Dickerson-Thompson; and generously funded by the Eugene and Agnes E. Meyer Foundation and the Humanities Council of Washington, D.C. The Greater U Street Heritage Trail is a distillation of that exhibit.

Special thanks go to Henry P. Whitehead for sharing his collections that reflect his unmatched devotion to this neighborhood, and to photographer Robert H. McNeill who has been so generous with his riveting photographs of Shaw in the 1930s and 1940s. Professor Edward C. Smith of American University, Virginia Ali of Ben’s Chili Bowl, Lori Dodson of the Thurgood Marshall Center, and the Cardozo Shaw Neighborhood Association have provided invaluable guidance from the beginning.

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This project also owes great thanks to the many others whose love for the U Street area has shaped this heritage trail.

*Kathryn S. Smith*
Cultural Tourism DC is an independent, nonprofit coalition of more than 230 culture, heritage, and community organizations throughout the Nation’s Capital. We help metro-area residents and visitors experience Washington’s authentic culture and heritage.

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District of Columbia Neighborhood Heritage Trails are the Official Walking Trails of the District of Columbia.

The Historical Society of Washington, D.C., promotes understanding of the Nation’s Capital as a city of crossroads where North and South, federal and local, urban and suburban, national and international, native and newcomer intersect, and where African American, white, Hispanic and Asian meet and become American. The Society is devoted to making the history of the Washington metropolitan area accessible and understandable to public audiences. For more information visit www.historydc.org.

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You are standing on Washington’s historic Black Broadway — the heart of African American life in Washington, D.C. from about 1900 to the 1950s. Duke Ellington, its most famous native son, grew up, was inspired, trained, and played his first music here. He is but one example of the leaders in law, medicine, the military, science, and the arts who were shaped by a community that valued education and supported achievement against great odds in a segregated society. Nearby Howard University was its guiding star.

The Lincoln Theater at mid-block across U Street, now restored to its 1922 grandeur, was one of three first-run movie theaters clustered on U Street. The Lincoln Colonnade behind the theater, since demolished, was a popular setting for balls, parties and performances. All the great entertainers played clubs on or near this boulevard — Cab Calloway, Pearl Bailey, Sarah Vaughn, Louis Armstrong, Billy Eckstine, and Jelly Roll Morton, to name a few.

Black-owned businesses; the offices of black lawyers, doctors, and dentists; and the headquarters of black social institutions clustered along U Street. Many of them occupied buildings that were financed, designed, and built by African Americans — unusual at the time.

At night and on weekends, U Street was a parade ground — a place to meet friends and share what many describe as a close, small-town atmosphere. And at its core was an elegance epitomized by Duke Ellington himself. The old-timers say that U Street was so grand that to come here you had to wear a tie.

On this walking tour of the U Street neighborhood, historical markers lead you to prominent buildings as well as little-known sites that witnessed the rich African American history of this “City within a City.” This illustrated guide will tell you about:


– The homes of poet Georgia Douglas Johnson and opera singer Madame Evanti.

– The first African American YMCA.

– A stunning park with a dramatic water cascade.

– Victorian-era domestic architecture.

– The African American Civil War Memorial.

– Nightclubs where Louis Armstrong, Sarah Vaughan, and other name entertainers played.

– The restored Lincoln Theatre.