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## Discover what makes city of empowerment

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By Adrienne Washington - Do you know how "Teenarama" and hand dancing put the District on the must-stop concert tours? Why is the District still known as "the Last Colony?" Any idea why the interstate dead-ends at New York Avenue Northwest? Wonder whether the District really recovered from the 1968 riots? Care if Washington ever becomes a young artist's "DreamCity?"

If you hanker to dig into the city's rich past and pledge to plant new seeds for growth, make your way to the Carnegie at 801 K St. NW this weekend for the three-day Washington Studies Conference on all that makes our often-maligned but beloved city unique.

"This is a Thanksgiving-Day-feast equivalent event for people interested in the culture and history of our city," said Bell Clement, executive director of the historical society. "This draws together all different kinds of Washingtonians in all different kinds of mediums to tell the story of Washington."

John Muller, 23, founder and executive director of the innovative theater troupe DreamCity, agrees.

"The Washington Studies Conference presents an opportunity for my generation to take a stake, to invest directly in the preservation of our own histories and stories," he said. "This is especially important this year because it will focus on how and why we are a city, where we are as a city and the direction the city is headed."

Mr. Muller views DreamCity as "an effort to return the performing arts to the community and bring attention to the rich heritage and untold folklore of the Washington metropolitan area." Current projects include "4 Days in April," about the 1968 riots, and "Southside," about the community's response to youth violence. Mr. Muller also seeks stories from Washingtonians to produce "City at War," about Georgetown during World War II.

With "D.C. on Stage," Mr. Muller's DreamCity, which represents a new generation of teens, will perform portions of his acclaimed play "The 70," about the observations of a driver as his bus route crisscrosses the District. Film producer Beverly Lindsay-Johns will screen "Dance Party: The Teenarama Story," which chronicles the D.C.-produced television show for blacks that aired from 1963 to 1970.

Intense, intelligent and committed, Mr. Muller was raised on a horse farm in Montgomery County by his white, middle-class parents who chose to enroll him in public school. After graduation from George Washington University in May, he was courted by numerous

corporations. He opted to teach middle school in the District briefly. A "living, breathing, walking history book," he spends a lot of time at the District of Columbia Public Library, where he volunteers for the adult literacy program.

"Our generation's culture is Marcus Dixon preparing to take the world by storm with his poetry and succeeding at DeMatha [High School] and Antwan Kingsbury teaching himself to play Beethoven on the piano by ear," Mr. Muller said of his proteges. "DreamCity exists to counter these monolithic depictions of our generation."

Marcus, 15, a former student of Mr. Muller's and a talent scout for DreamCity, said the troupe "gave me a chance to express myself outside my home." Mr. Muller's influence also helped him "when I was struggling in school and wanted to give up."

"DreamCity is self-determination of D.C. culture, and this is what the Washington Studies Conference is," Mr. Muller said.

No wonder "Empowerment" was chosen as the theme of this year's conference, which is designed to explore and commemorate the impact of the 1968 riots on the city's growth and development. The political, cultural and social shifts from the 1960s through the 1970s and the effects of that watershed moment on D.C. history 40 years ago are still felt.

Other aspects of the conference include lectures, films, plays, walking tours and uniquely D.C. hand-dancing lessons that feature old and new activists, artists, architects, scholars and students.

Ms. Clement especially hopes witnesses to the 1968 riots will attend to reveal untold stories that can be recorded by scholars and producers before they are lost.

"These storytellers are historians of the future," Ms. Clement said. "We put the producers together with the witnesses and hopefully that will strengthen everybody." A "History Network" on Friday promotes the efforts of local organizations working on preservation, neighborhood history and genealogy.

Juxtaposing generations, the Rev. Walter E. Fauntroy, the District's first congressional delegate, will talk about the movement that stopped Interstate 95 from being built through the Shaw neighborhood. His nephew, Michael Fauntroy, assistant professor of public policy at George Mason University, will participate in a panel discussing home rule and political autonomy.

Ms. Clement predicts the highlight of the conference will be a round-table discussion, "Memory: 1968," moderated by broadcaster and D.C. native Jerry Phillips, that includes civil rights leaders and activists, including former D.C. Council member Frank Smith and community organizer Bob King.

The Washington Historical Society, with support from other groups, has held the free annual conference for 34 years.

"The past isn't dead; it isn't even past," Ms. Clement said. "It's the furniture we're stumbling over."

For more information about the conference, go to [www.historydc.org](http://www.historydc.org) or call 202/383-1837.  
For more information about DreamCity, go to [www.dreamcitytg.org](http://www.dreamcitytg.org) or call 202/236-3413.

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