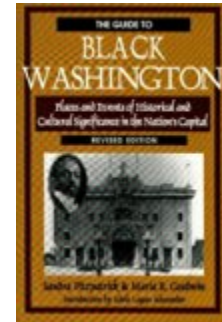


# H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Sandra Fitzpatrick, Maria R. Goodwin. *The Guide to Black Washington: Places and Events of Historical and Cultural Significance in the Nation's Capital*. New York: Hippocrene Books, 1999. 240 pp. \$16.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-7818-0647-3.

Reviewed by Laura Croghan Kamoie (Department of History, American University)  
Published on H-DC (September, 2001)



## The History of Black Washington

### The History of Black Washington Visited

In *The Guide to Black Washington*, Sandra Fitzpatrick and Maria Goodwin have compiled information on more than 150 historically or culturally important sites in approximately twenty neighborhoods throughout the city of Washington that played or continue to play important roles within the African-American community.

Though anecdotal in nature, together the entries reveal a number of major themes in both African-American history and the history of Washington, D.C. The sites in *The Guide* illuminate the national roles that Washington's African-American community played in education, culture, civil rights, and the formation of the black middle and upper class. Numerous nationally prominent African Americans who lived or spent a significant amount of time in Washington included Frederick Douglass, members of the Grimke family, Edward "Duke" Ellington, Mary McLeod Bethune, Ralph Bunche, Jean Toomer, Langston Hughes, Paul Laurence Dunbar, Robert and Mary Church Terrell, Charles Drew, Martin Luther King, Jr., and many others. The history of Washington's African-American community also includes themes that are relevant for African-American communities everywhere: those of self-help, civil rights activism, and the importance of religious and educational institutions. In Washington, Howard University—the most prominent African-American university for much of the twentieth century—played a crucial role within the local and national black communities. The well-educated

and qualified alumni of Howard filled the ranks of the city's secondary schools, including the famed M Street School (later Dunbar). African Americans who migrated to Washington during and after the Civil War often cited the city's strong schools as a major pull factor. Similarly, *The Guide* also reveals the difficulties that Washington's black schools, cultural and religious institutions, and communities experienced as a result of desegregation, when much of the core black middle class began moving out to the newly opened suburbs in Maryland and Virginia.

The book's entries describe persons or institutions that made significant contributions to Washington's development: Benjamin Banneker, Yarrow Mamout, Beverly Snow, the Metropolitan AME Church, and Mount Zion United Methodist Church. The authors, however, overlooked some notable sites such as the stately turn-of-the-century apartment buildings in Adams Morgan and the Octagon House at 18th Street and New York Avenue which interprets antebellum slave life. Also, limitations of sources and the lack of extant sites prevent the authors from providing greater detail about the pre-Civil War era. The authors do their best to be chronologically and geographically inclusive, but they are limited noticeably by the fact that many buildings or landmarks no longer exist. Examples include Beverly Snow's Epicurean Eating House (p. 35), the Washington Jail (p. 36), many sites along the Southwest waterfront (pp. 45-46), Dunbar High School (pp. 74-75), half of the LeDroit Park neighborhood (p. 85), Griffith Stadium (p. 114), and the Belasco Theater

(p. 196).

Taken as a whole, the entries highlight the shifting in the racial composition of Washington's neighborhoods. Anacostia was predominantly white before urban renewal; it is now predominantly black. By the mid-twentieth century, mostly white neighborhoods around Howard University, such as LeDroit Park and Logan Circle had transformed into middle class black residential areas. Georgetown, with a large working-class black population during the nineteenth century, became a largely middle and upper class—and predominantly white—neighborhood as a result of the new federal workers who poured into the city during the world wars.

As a resource for historians working on African-American history in Washington, *The Guide* has a number of limitations. While the book otherwise might be a great starting place to get information about who was active in a community and where he or she lived or worked, its usefulness is limited because its authors have not footnoted specific sources for any one person or site. In addition, minor but important details such as birth and death dates are not always provided for historical figures. However, the authors did not necessarily intend *The Guide* to be a resource for historians, instead aiming the book at Washingtonians interested in learning more about their own heritage.

As a travel guide, the book is much more successful, but could use a few additions to make it even more user friendly. Appealing features include well-designed and attractive maps at the front of each neighborhood section and general historical introductions of most, though not all, of the neighborhoods. The authors have also included a generally thorough bibliography of more than 130 titles published up until 1997. Finally, while energetic tourists

could potentially visit all of these sites on foot, the authors have designed three specific walking tours in the U Street-Shaw area that group together numerous sites. These tours are generally well designed, although there are a number of instances where the ordering of sites or the inclusion of outlying sites necessitates a three or four block walk, only then to require users to retrace their steps to continue the tour (see maps, pp. 118, 140, 162).

One important visual element the book lacks is an overall map of Washington depicting neighborhoods in relationship to one another and how best to get to them. This omission may result from the belief that Washingtonians already know their way around the city. As market research recently conducted for the new City Museum of Washington indicates, this is not a safe assumption. Moreover, the assumption reduces the guide's usefulness for visitors from outside the city. The guide also fails to list site addresses on the maps provided, forcing readers to flip back and forth in the book. Finally, *The Guide* would benefit greatly from the inclusion of pictures, particularly those of the highlighted personalities and of long-gone buildings. For example, the authors describe Charles Wilson Peale's portrait of Yarrow Mamout without providing an image of it (p. 205).

Despite its flaws, the guide fills a large hole in the resources that are available to study the history of African Americans in a city where that history has been so prominent and influential. The book could be useful to local teachers looking to design innovative assignments, to Washingtonians who want to further explore their city, and to visitors eager to venture off the Mall. The authors' stated intent was to "document historic sites and those black personalities that inhabited them" (Foreword). In this they definitely succeeded.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

<https://networks.h-net.org/h-dc>

**Citation:** Laura Croghan Kamoie. Review of Fitzpatrick, Sandra; Goodwin, Maria R., *The Guide to Black Washington: Places and Events of Historical and Cultural Significance in the Nation's Capital*. H-DC, H-Net Reviews. September, 2001.

**URL:** <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=5466>

Copyright © 2001 by H-Net, all rights reserved. H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for nonprofit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author, web location, date of publication, originating list, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For any other proposed use, contact the Reviews editorial staff at [hbooks@mail.h-net.msu.edu](mailto:hbooks@mail.h-net.msu.edu).