

U Street Dreams at Howard

Contributed by The Hilltop Editorial Staff -- Black College Wire
Thursday, 04 November 2010

Historically rich street threatened by crime

Langston Hughes wrote volumes of poetry and prose that described the era "when the Negro was in vogue." His tales come from a period of black high-life, in which socialites threw extravagant parties, clinked together champagne flutes and wrote what would become known as Harlem Renaissance literature.

Before the movement relocated to Harlem, its home was just steps away from Howard's campus at U Street, Washington D.C., the "city within a city." It was the epicenter of African-American culture in the early 20th-century.

The street and its historic buildings, whose Victorian-style architecture were crafted by blacks to house fraternal organizations, jazz clubs and theaters, have shifted into a nightlife destination for 20-somethings of all races.

Unfortunately, the revitalization of the U Street Corridor within the past 10 years has also made the historic district a venue for an increasing number of violent crimes. Just last week, five employees at U Street's DC9 nightclub were charged with aggravated assault, after beating patron Ali Ahmed Mohammed to death for throwing a brick into the window of the establishment.

The news broke not even a month after a deadly midday shooting occurred during a funeral at Walker Baptist Church on U Street.

Both incidents shocked area residents and Howard students alike, who consider U Street a quick getaway and cultural hotspot for food, music and fun.

Crime statistics for that area, according to DC.gov, have shown fluctuation in violent crimes since 2006. At some points, the rate was down by as much as 22 percent from the previous year (2007-2008) and at others, it rose by 18 percent from the previous year (2008-2009).

It is sad to think that we have to be on high alert while enjoying ourselves at a location made famous by prominent blacks of previous generations. However, it is a point that must be acknowledged. Though present day U Street is populated with diverse faces, this does not guarantee its safety at all times.

Next time you enjoy a meal at Busboys and Poets, indulge in the fact that the business is named after Langston Hughes, who became inspired to write poetry while working as a busboy. But also be sure to secure your wallet and look over your shoulder to be mindful of the reality of crime.

OUR VIEW: U Street's history should fill us with pride; however, the reality of modern day crime calls us to be cautious. The Hilltop, the Howard University student newspaper, originally published this article.

Articles in the Voices section reflect the opinions of the individual writers and do not represent the views of Black College Wire. {moshaloscan}