

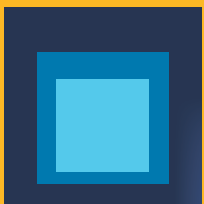
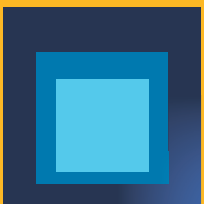
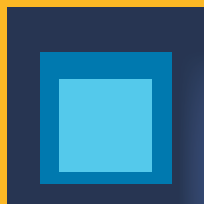
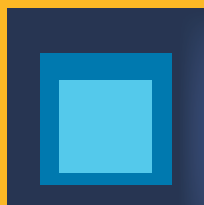
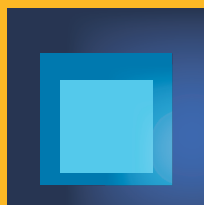
2026

CURIOUS MINDS

An Annual Zine Celebrating
Community Journalism in
Washington, DC. Featuring:

- Ozioma Anyanwu
- William Clarke IV
- Glenn Hall
- Ben Jaffe
- Rebecca John
- Sarah Loftus
- Alexandra Menter
- Shedrick Pelt
- Sade' Prue
- Beverly F. Smith
- Dancer Size

DC HISTORY CENTER 
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WELCOME TO THE 4TH EDITION OF CURIOUS MINDS

Thank you for reading *Curious Minds*, a compilation of stories written by the 2026 cohort of our Community Journalism Program (CJP). CJP helps to build the local community journalist pipeline by training DC residents in journalism 101. A stellar group of experienced journalists serve as instructors, trainers, mentors, and editors, providing participants with practical guidance and support.

Over the 14-week program, workshops alternate with small group sessions. Simultaneously, participants put their new knowledge into practice by reporting and writing a story on a topic of their choosing. Many of their stories were published locally.

As the DC news landscape continues to shift, it is heartening to see outlets evolve and emerge to fill gaps in coverage of local news and culture. Our program also plays a role in filling those gaps by training residents to identify and write about the untold stories, overlooked issues and unsung heroes of their communities.

Please reach out if you would like to collaborate, be a publishing partner, or otherwise support our work.

Enjoy!

Lois Nembhard

Director of Grantmaking & Public Programs



CURIOUS MINDS

2026 Community Journalism Zine

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Bukom Cafe Returns—Again—to Adams Morgan

By Ozioma Anyanwu

In the mid-afternoon, just before happy hour, there are moments in Adams Morgan where a visitor can hear the neighborhood come alive with the Afrobeats in Bukom Cafe. Inside the restaurant, the walls are covered with newly acquired Pan-African art created by the Cameroonian painter Shiri Achu. The kente-patterned mosaic bartop is a part of the cafe's original decor; it's now on its fifth opening. Sitting at the bar, I hear this new iteration of the restaurant has patrons animated and commenting favorably. There is a new energy in this esteemed space.

When Bukom Cafe opened in 1992, it was one of the first West African restaurants in DC, according to the original owner, Justice Matey. Over the decades, others like it have come and gone. After New York City, the Washington Metropolitan Region has the second-largest Sub-Saharan African-born immigrant population in the country, according to the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey. Yet, nationalities with significant local populations, like Nigerians, Ghanaians, and Cameroonians, are not well represented among the array of the city's eateries. Businesses catering to residents from those countries are mostly located in the neighboring Maryland and Virginia suburbs.

Nonetheless, with an undeniably West African offering that features dishes from multiple countries, including Nigeria, Ghana, and Senegal, Bukom Cafe has survived and often thrived in its present location on 18th Street for over 30 years.

“[BUKOM] BECAME A HOME OF THE DIASPORA, BUT ALSO WHITE, BLACK, LATINO, ASIAN, [AND] HISPANIC” COMMUNITY MEMBERS.

Its menu was first inspired by the West African heritage of Matey and his family.

It's well-placed in Adams Morgan, given the neighborhood's international dining scene, according to Kristen Barden, executive director of the Adams Morgan Partnership Business Improvement District.

“Adams Morgan has always been a neighborhood where global cuisine builds the community fabric,” said Barden. “When a longtime business like Bukom Cafe updates its space and brings fresh energy to its reopening, it sends a strong message that legacy businesses still have an important and evolving role to play in Adams Morgan...” “That balance of history and renewal is part of what keeps the neighborhood vibrant.”

Hemen “Amy” Solomon, Bukom's newest owner as of February, is a native of Ethiopia who began frequenting the cafe during the 2000s. She believes that Matey wanted it to feel like home.

“That's the reason he opened this place,” she said. “[Bukom] became a home of the diaspora, but also White, Black, Latino, Asian, [and] Hispanic” community members. All these years later, Solomon said she intends to nurture and grow that same welcoming energy.

When customers came to the reopening, they were initially concerned about the authenticity of the food because she is not West African, Solomon said. But she insists she is determined to maintain West African cuisine at the core of Bukom.

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"I always loved Nigerian culture because I'm really drawn to...the loudness, yet so much fun and so much depth to it," she said.

Over the past couple of months, her position has involved some education. For example, she had never tried jollof rice before taking ownership of Bukom. Now it's her favorite dish, along with goat pepper soup and pounded yam, which she has practiced making by hand.

What makes Bukom's lasting success even more impressive are the challenges DC restaurateurs already have to withstand, including the pandemic, increased wages for tipped workers through Initiative 82, federal layoffs, and the government shutdown. The restaurant and food service industry is the largest private employer in the District, and restaurateurs of all cuisines are making an effort to stay open amid the challenges.

Since last year, federal immigration enforcement has escalated and destabilized the dining industry in DC, and Black immigrants are being disproportionately impacted. A record number of D.C. restaurants closed in 2025, the Restaurant Association of Metropolitan Washington's spring member survey showed, and 54% of restaurants reported lower sales while 69% reported reduced profitability.

Over the years, Solomon said she has noticed the transience of other DC West African restaurants, such as Sumah's West African Restaurant, Busstown DC, and Ghana Cafe.

There are many difficulties with running a restaurant in general, such as managing HVAC and the art of pricing alcohol to be both affordable to the customer and profitable for the restaurant owners, Solomon said. But other challenges are more unique to West African restaurants, like finding knowledgeable staff and locating specific ingredients. Dishes such as goat pepper soup aren't in the average chef's repertoire and its ingredients prove harder to source, compared to the

seafood and vegetable-centric dishes that make up most Ethiopian menus.

In March, when Mayor Muriel Bowser took to X to tout the rise of DC's Michelin star restaurants from zero in 2025 to 21 this year, her comment section received a barrage of negative remarks about her neglect of DC's restaurant industry. Posters condemned the closure of "Mom and Pop shops" and the lack of affordable food options in the city.

That tension between prestige and availability is increasingly visible in the kinds of restaurants opening across the city. In recent years, a group of African restaurants has opened in the District that are noticeably upscale, some founded by a celebrity chef, and reliant on an unorthodox fusion of cuisines from across the African diaspora. Restaurants like Elmina, Marcus DC, and Dögon appeal to patrons who are unfamiliar with traditional African cuisine and are willing to pay up to \$100 for a single shareable.

However, there is a stark difference between restaurants that target a wealthier clientele and those that are more accessible. That raises questions about the future of Bukom and restaurants like it.

Solomon isn't nervous at all. She imagines West African food to be "like how Indian restaurants or Chinese restaurants are so broadly talked about" for people of all nationalities, ages, and backgrounds. "I want anyone who takes over from here to know that I worked for it. I handed it to them in a better position."

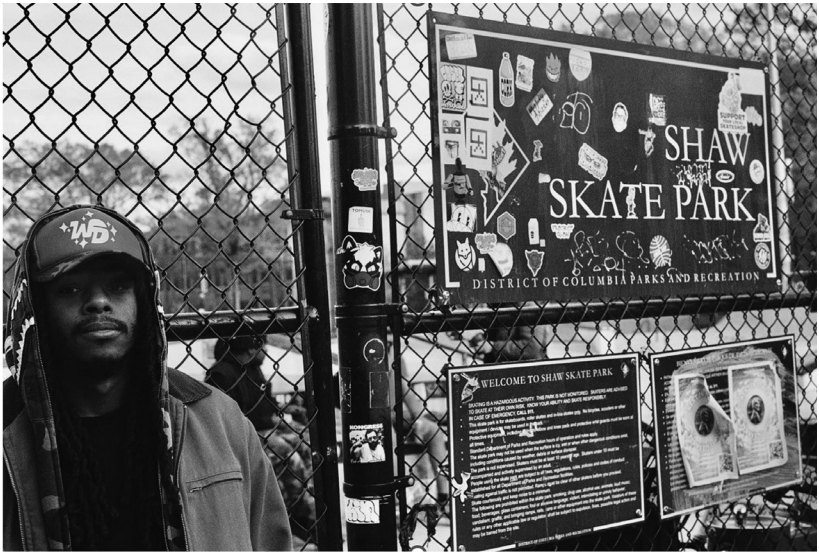
The fate of Bukom is not Solomon's alone, however. The continued support from DC's restaurant-goers may show just how important cultural preservation is in the nation's capital city.



How 'Beautification' Threatens DC's Treasured Skate Spots

Skaters say city-run skate parks can't replace the history and culture that grew in spaces like Freedom Plaza.

by William (Phresh Ingredient) Clarke IV



Kerim Joseph AKA Kerim The DJ. Credit: William Clarke IV.

Before the fences went up in December, you could stand at the corner of Pennsylvania Ave. NW and 13th Street NW on any given afternoon and watch skateboards clattering off the granite ledges of Freedom Plaza. A teen would launch off a set of stairs, hang in the air a half-second longer than physics seemed to allow, and land cleanly.

To the skating world, this was hallowed ground, known as “Pulaski Park” after the statue of Brigadier General Casimir Pulaski anchoring its east end. Thrasher magazine, the sport’s bible, devoted a documentary to the plaza’s history, and skate legends like Darren Harper have made their names on its marble.

But the plaza closed for construction in December, and metal fixtures have since been bolted onto the ledges, rails, and fountain encasements to prevent grinding. Around the same time, fences went up around two other popular skate spots: the long-empty fountains at Malcolm X Park and an underpass in Navy Yard on Half Street SE.

Renovations at each place were spurred by President Donald Trump’s March 2025 executive order to “beautify” D.C., an effort that has accelerated the erasure of informal skating spaces that made Washington, D.C., one of the East Coast’s premier skate destinations.

Dating back to the 1980s, skaters from across the region have made the trip into the city to claim its plazas, fountains, and granite edges. Freedom Plaza’s smooth marble ground, open design, and varied terrain made it a place that felt “like it was made for skateboarding,” as longtime D.C. skater Arthur Lisi told *The Diamondback* in 2022. It became a proving ground for generations of local skaters and a destination for visitors from across the country.

As unofficial skate spots have been fenced off and renovated into compliance, the District government has expanded its network of sanctioned skate parks. Shaw Skate Park opened in 2011 just north of downtown and subsequently became a gravitational center of the scene. Banneker Skate Park, Skate Park at RFK Campus, and Green Skate Lab followed.

The six parks offer a dedicated outlet for riders, but skaters will tell you they’re no replacement for the freedom to move

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through a city and improvise on your own terms, like a jazz musician playing off the energy of the room. Take the fountains at Malcolm X Park. They were never intended as a skate spot, but when they went dry, skaters found an opportunity. Shaped like shallow pools, the fountains offered something rare in the middle of the city: transitions, or curved surfaces where flat ground sweeps upward into a wall, allowing skaters to build momentum for tricks.

When the park closed for renovations this spring, many District residents protested the temporary loss of grassy space, and celebrated when the fountains reopened in May. Hardly anyone mentioned the skaters' loss.

The relationship between skaters and the city has rarely been easy. Skateboarding at Freedom Plaza is technically illegal, and DCist reported that U.S. Park Police routinely chased skaters from the plaza going back to the 1990s. The city's posture has long been one of enforcement first: pushing skaters out of most public spaces and, more recently, into designated skate parks.

"I'm just so used to getting kicked out everywhere because you got a skateboard," said Kerim Joseph, who arrived in D.C. from Brooklyn in 2013.

Known around the city's music and skate circles as Kerim The DJ, he found his way into the scene through Shaw, drawn in less by the skating than by the way people talked about the skaters who came before them. One of those legends is Pepe Martinez, from Falls Church, who in the early 1990s helped popularize street skateboarding in the region. He died in 2003, leaving behind a legacy the community still passes down like scripture.

"No matter who I talk to, no matter how old they are, they'll put me on to something that's specifically from here that is very



Kerim Joseph AKA Kerim The DJ. Credit: William Clarke IV.

important to them, even though it happened years and years before them,” Kerim said. It’s the specific spaces, used across generations, that have built a skate culture unique to D.C., one where the history of a ledge is as important as what you do on it.

But the respect for D.C. often doesn’t feel mutual. On June 21, 2025, on Go Skateboarding Day, an annual holiday established in 2004 to celebrate skate culture and push back against the forces trying to contain it, DC police cleared Freedom Plaza. After a long session across the city, artist and skater Danny Cappello said his crew rolled up to Pulaski and was told to leave. It’s not the first time: In 2016, police shut down a gathering of hundreds of skateboarders there on Go Skateboarding Day.

The Go Skateboarding Day clearing was one moment in a longer pattern. Asked about the overall landscape of skate spaces in the city, the DC Department of Parks and Recreation pushed back on the narrative of loss. “We have six skate parks, and we have not closed any in our inventory,” a spokesperson said.

To many in the community, that misses the point.

The sanctioned parks were never interchangeable with the open public spaces skaters claimed. They haven’t been core

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to D.C.'s skate identity for decades, like Freedom Plaza. They rarely offer the chance for something new and unexpected, like Malcolm X Park. You can't replace a landmark with a facility.

Cappello has skated Freedom Plaza since he was about 13. He is clear-eyed, not sentimental, about what has happened. Even after the latest Go Skateboarding Day clearing, skaters kept showing up, and for the most part, the police have let them. "The bright side is, we won," he said. "DC police did not come around anymore. They did not take our boards, and it kind of became our place."

What bothers him more than the closures is the kind of thing that threatens to replace them. A few months before the fences went up in December, a portable mini-ramp appeared near Pulaski, apparently sponsored by an AI company. Cappello called it a sanitized, branded approximation of skate culture, dropped into a place whose meaning clearly wasn't understood by those who put it there.

That's a real threat: not just that spaces might get shut down, but that they get hollowed out and handed back as something unrecognizable. "They had no idea what Pulaski was," Cappello said. "I'd rather have it dead than zombified."

What disappears with a genuinely public space isn't just a ledge. It's the social fabric of beginners learning their first tricks and older skaters showing up on Sundays not to skate hard, but just to be there. None of that heartbeat gets replaced when the concrete does. Still, skaters will find a way.

"They can close every single place we have," Cappello said, "and we'll find something to skate. Skateboarders are some of the most resilient, adaptable people on the face of the planet."

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Danny Cappello. Credit: William Clarke IV



Oxon Run Park is a Leafy Refuge in Ward 8. Locals are Working to Make it Inviting for Everyone.

by Glenn Hall

In the far reaches of Southeast D.C., Oxon Run Park sprawls over 128 acres, making it the largest green space under D.C.'s Department of Parks and Recreation control and a refuge for the surrounding plants, animals, and people within an otherwise urban landscape.

There is an abundance of wildlife to be found in this picturesque park, from foxes to deer, fish to frogs, and birds to bats. As for the human inhabitants of the area, Oxon Run Park is located in Ward 8, which, per the latest Census Report, is 81% Black and has the highest rates of poverty in the city. For many of these residents, access to green space takes a back seat to life's many stressors.

Nonetheless, these and many other factors make green spaces like Oxon Run Park all the more valuable as an escape, and make it critical that the park is preserved and accessible to those who live in the area.

Growing up, I called Oxon Run Park my second home, and it is why I decided to become an environmentalist. The plentiful access to nature I was so lucky to have growing up nurtured me, especially in times of uncertainty or when I needed to relax and reflect.

From birth up until January 2025, I lived less than a five-minute walk from the park. On the other end was my grandmother's



A sunny day at the James Bunn Amphitheater near 13th St. and Mississippi Ave., SE. Credit: Glenn Hall

home, where all of my family was raised. My mom, sister, and I would use Oxon Run Park as a shortcut to get to Grandma's house. All the while, I was enamored with the creek, imagining going on countless grand adventures, as many kids do.

From those early days of walks to grandma's house to my time at Hart Middle School — which is right in the middle of the park — to the present day, Oxon Run Park has been a safe haven for me. In the many phases of my life, it has remained a constant.

At the same time, Oxon Run Park itself has changed significantly. All the way up until the pandemic hit, I would see burnt-out cars underneath the bridges. Sometimes, piles of trash and other debris were dumped in the park, with no trash can in sight. There was a plentiful population of cotton-tail rabbits that I would chase as a little boy, but I haven't seen a rabbit in the park in years.

Oxon Run Park's evolution

Established in 1971 after the National Park Service transferred roughly 300 acres of land to DC, Oxon Run Park has seen multiple waves of improvements over the years.

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A major effort took place in 2018, when sections of the walking path were repaved, lighting was added throughout, and other safety features like guard rails were added to the areas directly near the creek. In 2024, three playgrounds that were in need of repairs were upgraded and rebuilt. Meanwhile, the Southeast Tennis and Learning Center is currently finishing up construction on a \$23 million dollar addition, with plans for a summer 2026 opening.

There has been an ebb and flow of development, and some park amenities still fall short. Only one public Throne restroom reopened after a funding freeze in 2025, and there are not enough trash cans throughout the park, nor is there consistent trash pick up. Still, changes have been trending in a positive direction.

But are these developments what the community is asking for? Riley Piva, a community planner with the Department of Parks and Recreation, said the agency aims to shape the future of the park with community input, which is reflected in the Oxon Run Master Park Plan.

"The master plan is a record of what the community wants. To translate what the community wants into a design that we can construct, trust is the keystone to all of this," Piva said. "The best way that we can activate a park is through trust, trust that when the community speaks to us we will listen, trust when we build or provide an amenity we will take care of it...a lot rides on that trust."

Organizing to make Oxon Run welcoming

Friends of Oxon Run (FOR), a nonprofit founded under an initiative started in part by the late "Mayor for life" Marion Barry, advocates to protect and preserve the park and encourage its stewardship by residents. At the helm of this organization is Absalom Jordan (he will insist that you call him Ab), a lifelong advocate who understands that green spaces

“THE PREVAILING NARRATIVE IS THAT THE OUTDOORS DOESN'T HAVE A PLACE FOR PEOPLE OF COLOR, ESPECIALLY BLACK PEOPLE, WHICH, IF YOU LOOK AROUND AT THE SPACE, YOU WOULD SEE IS DEMONSTRABLY FALSE.”

like these are not only critical habitat for DC's wildlife, but also for people to ground themselves and connect with nature.

The prevailing narrative is that the outdoors doesn't have a place for people of color, especially Black people, which, if you look around at the space, you would see is demonstrably false. Rather, we are often gatekept out of these spaces by white supremacy. To help change that, Friends of Oxon Run and other local organizations like DC Greens and the Washington Area Bicyclists Association's DC Trail Rangers are working to increase access to green space by putting together recreational and educational activities within the park.

As a volunteer with FOR, I was thinking about how we could encourage more people — especially those who live in one of the many neighborhoods that border the park — to use it more often. It's been shown time and time again, in study after study, that access to nature has an extensive positive impact on our mental and physical well-being. That's how the idea for Oxon Run Day was born.

In its first iteration in 2022, environmental nonprofits, government agencies such as the DC Department of Energy and Environment, and other organizations gathered for a “Green Fair” to share resources, educate residents, and build community in Oxon Run Park. The event blossomed into the

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even bigger Oxon Run Day the following year. The goal is to only grow bigger and bigger in order to show residents that Oxon Run Park is a place for them, a place to commune with each other and with nature.

As Mr. Ab put it, "The park, and I mean all of the park, including the portion within the National Park Service jurisdiction and the Magnolia Bog, is a jewel in Ward 8 that needs to be used and protected against development that doesn't benefit our community. We can't make people understand; we can help them understand."

And one of the best ways to help someone understand something is to meet them where they are. "How are people going to create core childhood memories if they cannot access the nature that's right there for them?" Piva asked.

Activations within the park, especially those with a strong emphasis on youth, draw people in for a good time. What they leave with, hopefully, is a greater understanding and appreciation of why green spaces and the environment as a whole are so important. By building a community that cares for the world around them, we can ensure the continued protection of the park for generations to come.

This article was originally published by Greater Greater Washington on September 23, 2026.



How DC Peace Team Is Training Neighbors to Keep Each Other Safe as Federal Enforcement Increases

Peacebuilding facilitators Sheherazade Jafari and Tarek Maassarani discuss rising demand for de-escalation training, ICE-related interventions, and empowering residents with nonviolent skills.

by Ben Jaffe

To say D.C. is going through tumultuous times is an understatement. Since the start of the second Trump presidency, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement has often clashed with residents, threats to D.C. home rule have increased, the National Guard has been deployed through 2029 at least, and the Metropolitan Police were temporarily taken over by the federal government. These interventions led to nearly 20,000 arrests in the region as of April, with nearly 60 percent of arrested individuals having no criminal record.

As the community's trust in police has eroded, many residents, activists, and organizations have had to adapt to this new reality, working to ensure they understand their rights and how to protect themselves. One nonprofit at the forefront of these efforts is the DC Peace Team, which trains and empowers residents to become nonviolent agents of sustainable peace and justice.

Since 2010, DCPT has trained more than 12,000 unarmed civilian peacekeepers to address the needs of their community. The organization has expanded to include programs focused

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on restorative justice, community violence intervention, equity initiatives, and peace education. Its team includes a number of peacebuilding and justice experts, many of whom lead the trainings and programs.

DCPT facilitators Sheherazade Jafari, Ph.D., an adjunct professor who teaches courses on religion and conflict at Georgetown University, and Tarek F. Maassarani, a lecturer in justice and peace studies at Georgetown University, both have decades of experience in the peacebuilding field. We spoke with them about what they've been observing while leading programs during this tumultuous time in D.C.

Washington City Paper: Can you give a brief background on your experience in peacebuilding and how you got involved with DCPT?

Sheherazade Jafari: I've been involved with DCPT for a year. However, I have been working within the peacebuilding and conflict resolution field for a while. I co-founded a consulting collective called Ripple Collective. We work with social change organizations at the community level, supporting organizations and communities working through conflict and centering equity and justice. I also teach at Georgetown University. Eli McCarthy, one of the founders [of DCPT], also teaches there. He asked if I would be interested in joining DCPT. Their active bystander training in particular is similar to some work I've been doing in Albuquerque, New Mexico, with community safety responders.

Tarek Maassarani: I came to D.C., to attend law school at Georgetown and volunteered at various community-based organizations while there. I practiced law for a number of years, and I was really drawn to mediation. One of the first things I did was obtain a mediation certification and then mediated for Montgomery County Mediation Center. Afterward, I received a master's degree in international affairs.

**“THE THE DCPT [DC PEACE TEAM]
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NONVIOLENCE.”**

I met with Eli and Curtis Watkins from the National Homecomers Academy around 2008. They were accompanying elementary school students in places where there had been shootings to make them feel safer. Since then, I’ve had various engagements with DCPT ... Since the start of the second Trump administration, there’s been such a surge of intervention and de-escalation requests.

WCP: With the takeover of the police and everything in the past year, what have you been seeing on the ground as members of DCPT and as peacebuilding professionals?

Jafari: I can only speak for DCPT in the last year. The number of folks interested in DCPT training has increased. It’s been incredible to witness residents who show up, their level of engagement, and a desire to support their neighbors. It’s everyday folks, not just my students.

Maassarani: When I came to D.C. in 2002, the city was still Top 10 in homicides. I remember in 2018, DCPT started having a presence in Chinatown and an occasional demonstration at the Supreme Court. Since George Floyd, it has been an interesting dynamic for DCPT. We have generally stepped in to help progressively identifying folks pushing for change, but it’s been more politically and racially charged over the past five years.

We do training with the local museums and history centers that told us they are seeing political unrest in their buildings. They have no clue when and if the National Guard or ICE

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might assist. We definitely have gotten loads of ICE-related intervention requests within the past year and a half. More and more of the threat is coming from the federal government.

The DCPT has a tradition of nonviolent civilian protection work, which is cultural and spiritual. It's about living and embodying nonviolence. It's not just something you do when showing up at a demonstration.

Jafari: Piggybacking off of what you were saying, Tarek ... one of the first trainings I led with DCPT was for a coffee shop. D.C. is such a unique place, and the coffee shop would sometimes get folks coming back from protests, so it was in the midst of the action whether or not it wanted to be. They want their staff to be prepared, so we trained baristas on active bystander intervention and de-escalation.

WCP: Now that the situation in D.C., has changed, is there anything you're teaching that has been particularly effective?

Jafari: We talk about specific strategies and tactics for nonviolence, but the bigger thing we talk about is how you can't always prepare for situations. You can't plan for everything, so it is really more about your overall orientation. Seeing nonviolence as part of your everyday life and seeing the humanity in the other person.

I notice folks attend trainings while anxious because they want me to tell them what to do in specific situations. I hope, and do believe, they're leaving with a feeling that there is actually a lot that any person can do in a situation to support other people. They should know they can trust themselves.

Maassarani: I love role-play. We push people in uncomfortable ways. We put people in situations where other participants say slurs to them. Additionally, people come up with other really creative ways to engage. Most people think of comedy, with the principles of improv, translating very well into these

scenarios. Humor can switch the whole mood.

Jafari: The first tactic we talk about is centering, really checking in with yourself before stepping into a situation. There are all sorts of ways people do this: taking breaths, a mantra, prayer, and noticing their surroundings. If you're dysregulated, then maybe you're not the right person to be helping right now.

WCP: Looking to the future, is there anything bringing you hope?

Jafari: People are showing up. There is continued interest and demand for these training sessions. I mean, ultimately it's like, 'how are we supporting each other?' I see more and more people really wanting to do that. Folks are getting better at recognizing social power and privilege, how they can use them and having more honest conversations about that.

Maassarani: Over the years, I've seen a lot of fracturing within social movements. But more recently that's changed. I've seen a lot more coherence within these movements, more sticking with it ... A lot of residents are engaging in these trainings and seeing that the principle of nonviolence is personal, not just a political public commitment.

To participate in DC Peace Team trainings, donate, or learn more, head to its website.

This article was originally published by the Washington City Paper on July 8, 2026.



Beloved Community Incubator Strengthens a Cooperative Economy in D.C.

This worked-led nonprofit equips D.C. residents with the tools and resources to own their labor and what it produces, shifting power to local communities.

by Rebecca John

In response to fears over the 2016 presidential election results, community organizers Kristen Kane and Bianca Vazquez held a series of listening sessions with their Ward 2 neighbors in the basement of Luther Place Memorial Church. Along with immigration, employment and uncertainty over whether the bills would get paid were chief among residents' worries. Wage theft, harsh working environments, and a desire for a better life all surfaced in conversations about work.

That same year, inspired by these listening sessions, Kane and Vazquez created Beloved Community Incubator, an organization that aims to foster a regional solidarity economy based on democratic, collective ownership and community accountability instead of profit-maximizing incentives. (The name references Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s vision for a "beloved community" built on justice, peace, and community care.) Worker-owned cooperatives—businesses where ownership and decision-making power are shared among workers—are key to the solidarity economy Kane and Vazquez are helping build.

"We want there to be family-sustaining jobs in the DMV and for people to have autonomy and self-direction within

their life,” says Kane.

More than 10 years later, BCI’s work continues, and the need for economic security has only grown. As of April 2026, D.C.’s unemployment rate is the highest in the country at 6.2 percent. This follows a year marked by layoffs, including the Trump administration’s reduction of the federal workforce. In January 2025, before the cuts, the District’s 192,800 federal employees comprised nearly a quarter of all D.C.’s workers. By December 2025, this number dropped to 168,400 employees. There are signs the private sector has not been spared from the economic fallout: At least 123 businesses announced layoffs in the D.C. area last year, according to the Washington Post.

Amid widespread economic pressure, solutions may seem to be outside of the hands of everyday people. But the cooperative “one member, one vote” model is designed to give workers a say over what happens in their places of employment and their communities. BCI aims to help workers control their own destiny by building economic power through cooperative business ownership, access to non-extractive capital, and network-based support. Since its inception, BCI has grown to support a network of more than 30 cooperatives and has deployed more than \$3 million and 2,000 hours in direct assistance, according to Kane.

Cooperatives have deep roots in D.C.

“Cooperatives have always been part of D.C.,” says Kate Mereand, former program manager at the DC Department of Small and Local Business Development. “I think there was a lot of effort done to erase people’s understanding of cooperatives, but I do think that they’ve been a natural part of human commerce and organization for an incredibly long time.”

Cooperatives have been integrated in the D.C. economy since at least the 1800s, according to research by global affairs

“COOPERATIVES ARE ONE OF THE PLACES THAT PEOPLE STARTED TO INTEGRATE BEFORE DESEGREGATION...”

scholar Johanna Bockman, though their popularity and legal recognition has shifted over time. “Cooperatives are one of the places that people started to integrate before desegregation,” Mereand says. “It was also seen as a threat in different ways.”

By the mid-1940s, Congress was holding hearings to discuss whether cooperatives were un-American and a “threat to private enterprise in the United States.” Very few cooperatives formed in D.C. over the following decade, according to Bockman’s research. By contrast, cooperatives proliferated during the Civil Rights Movement of the ‘60s until losing political favor in the mid-’80s.

Relationship mitigates risk

Jessica Gordon-Nembhard, a scholar who has documented the history of Black cooperatives as a means of economic survival, says this model has a long record of resiliency in times of uncertainty.

“Solidarity economics is a sustainable model because it’s about relationships, human beings relating to each other and human beings surviving and thriving,” says Gordon-Nembhard. “We also found during COVID, that worker-owned companies were more likely to survive during crises.”

While layoffs are a common response to economic instability for many traditional businesses, worker cooperatives tend to seek alternate options. “Sometimes [cooperatives] might vote to take a pay cut for a little while to weather a storm or they might vote to change the allocation of time so the people who need more hours can get more hours,” says Gordon-Nembhard.

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“Like anything, it reflects the care that you put into it,” says Josh King, co-founder of Throneless Tech, a D.C.-based cooperative that builds software and digital security training for social justice movements. “[Cooperatives are] not a silver bullet that solves all of the problems, but it means that everyone is a meaningful participant, and everyone has a say.”

Like any business, cooperatives need funding to grow, but their unique worker-ownership structure and values are often misunderstood or out of alignment with the expectations of many traditional banks and investors. BCI’s DC Solidarity Economy Loan Fund is filling this funding gap by providing loans specifically structured for cooperatives.

BCI’s DC SELF is a local chapter of Seed Commons, a cooperatively governed nonprofit CDFI focused on building financial infrastructure to combat rising inequality. Their loan terms are intended to be non-extractive and patient; there are no personal guarantees or automatic payments. Meaning, if the business does not succeed, owners don’t lose their personal assets and loan repayment only begins when the cooperative is stable enough to afford it.

In 2023, Throneless Tech received a \$160,000 revolving line of credit from DC SELF, which King says was key to ensuring that workers were paid regularly and on time while they were working on a large project with an inconsistent payment schedule.

According to Evan Wright, BCI’s outreach director, the real magic of the incubator’s work is its relational approach: a commitment to “deep accompaniment.” The incubator prioritizes building genuine relationships, which allows them to offer personalized support to help cooperatives realize their visions while reaching financial sustainability.

King says Throneless Tech’s relationship with BCI has grown beyond the loan. BCI has provided conflict facilitation, project

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management coaching, and sales support to handle headwinds related to federal funding cuts. In turn, Throneless Tech has supported BCI's network by providing guidance to other cooperatives.

"BCI really cares how well we do and what's happening with us, and we really care about BCI doing well," says King. "We're really invested in this community of [the] local solidarity economy."

Cooperation creates joyful possibilities

Gordon-Nembhard believes the solidarity economy "helps create harmony as well as joy," citing a 2002 study from Emory University that found when people engage in cooperation, their endorphins, or happy hormones, increase. "For me, the future is this happiness and satisfaction through collective, cooperative, economic activity," Gordon-Nembhard says. "I really feel like it's our only chance to stay human."

At a recent Earth Day celebration hosted by BCI network member Takoma Park Silver Spring Food Co-op, a live band played working-class blues while kids danced with elders. Neighbors toured the Zero Waste grocery store and learned about its community fundraising campaign to open a second location.

As Kane spoke in Spanish with a group of women interested in learning about co-ops, a young girl scribbled on a BCI coloring sheet. Wright's description of the incubator's vision felt tangible: "[When] workers are able to own their labor and what it produces, that impact doesn't just stay with the individual... It radiates out to the community." those who live in the area.

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Trail Rangers Bike the Extra Mile to Tend to D.C.'s Trail System

Meet the "Swiss Army knife of trail maintenance crews."

by Sarah Loftus



Trail ranger Natty McAlpine demonstrates how to cut invasive English ivy vines to prevent them from growing further at a monthly volunteer event.
Credit: Sarah Loftus

Natty McAlpine crouches down to point out an invasive garlic mustard plant on the edge of the Marvin Gaye Trail in Ward 7, showing a small group of volunteers how the plant's leaf shape reveals its age. He plucks it out by its roots before instructing the group how to tackle their main target for the day: the invasive English ivy crawling up trees beside the trail.

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McAlpine, who was leading a monthly “Bicyclists Against Invasive Vines” event that Saturday morning, is one of six year-round trail rangers who serve as stewards of more than 25 miles of D.C.’s paved trails, keeping them in good condition and helping people make use of these outdoor resources. He describes the trail rangers as the “Swiss Army knife of trail maintenance crews.”

They bike along the trails in electric cargo bikes, picking up litter and debris, cutting back overgrown vegetation, managing invasive plants, helping out trail users, and relaying repair needs and other issues to the appropriate government agencies. They also lead volunteer and outreach events on the trails, including trash cleanups and a monthly morning coffee hour. Over the years, they’ve logged thousands of instances of maintenance and service work.

“We’re on bikes, we’re doing this work from a human level, so we’re experiencing what pedestrians and cyclists are experiencing in real time,” he explains.

The program, which is run by the Washington Area Bicyclists Association with funding from the D.C. government, was created in 2013. Rangers work on the Anacostia Riverwalk, Metropolitan Branch, Oxon Run, Marvin Gaye, 295/Malcolm X Interchange, Suitland Parkway, and Kingle Valley trails, all of which D.C. agencies are responsible for maintaining. (Disclosure: this author is a member of WABA).

Most of these multi-use trails are separated from roadways, making them safer and more accessible for a variety of trail users, from a kid on a bike to someone roller skating. (Other paved trails on federal land in D.C., like the Capital Crescent Trail and Rock Creek Trail, are maintained by the National Park Service instead.)

Trail rangers’ weekday work shifts start at 6:30 a.m. Depending on

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the day, pairs of rangers either bike along the trail and respond to what they find or head to a specific trail section to tackle issues they scouted out previously. Their work bikes are packed with an eclectic grab bag of anything that they or other trail users might need — a bike tire pump, trail maps, trash bags and grabbers, saws and pruning tools, gardening gloves, a leaf blower, a dust pan and brush for broken glass, among other items.

The Trail Ranger grant, issued by the District Department of Transportation, initially only covered summer work but expanded to year-round service in 2022 with \$680,000 in annual funding. It allows WABA to employ a full-time crew, including the six year-round rangers (four field staff and two program managers), a director, and a couple of summer rangers.

While the grant agreement outlines baseline requirements (such as how often to visit specific trails), they often do much more than what's required, according to McAlpine. This year, for example, the rangers hacked away at snowcrete on the trails.

"This job is tough," said McAlpine, who has worked the trails for three and a half years. He remembers a day when fellow crew member Agyei Williams carried out 92 tires that were illegally dumped by Oxon Run.





Trail Rangers Alvin Zepeda, Natty McAlpine and Agyei Williams (opposite page, left to right) take pride in maintaining over 25 miles of D.C.'s bike trails; their cargo bikes are packed with anything and everything they might need. Credit: Sarah Loftus

Williams, who's been a trail ranger for a little over four years, lives within a mile of the Oxon Run Trail. "I show up on all the trails, but there's a little extra in the tank when we're in Ward 8 and Ward 7," he said. Through his bike commute and spending time with his kids, he said he gets to see the result of the rangers' work and takes a lot of pride in seeing those areas taken care of.

People passing on the trail sometimes recognize the rangers and thank them for what they do. "It's those kind of moments where I feel like a superhero and why for me I get a lot of fulfillment in just being of service and doing what I'm doing with the team," said Alvin Zepeda, who has been doing the work for a little over a year.

Events like Bicyclists Against Invasive Vines have also earned some regular volunteers, such as longtime cyclist Abby DeRoberts. "When I saw a cycling organization taking on the invasive plants, which have a huge impact on the landscape of

our bike trails, I was very excited to step in and do something where I could actually make a difference," she said.

Over the past two years of that series, ranger-led volunteers have released over 400 trees from the grip of invasive vines that can smother native plants and destroy habitats.

John O'Neill, an arborist and lawyer with DDOT's Urban Forestry Division who administers the Trail Ranger grant, said the rangers are a high-performing, autonomous group.

He recalled how the group initiated trail work days on the Suitland Parkway Trail. While they regularly inspect the trail, the rangers aren't able to perform regular maintenance due to its unsafe proximity to a busy road. So they partnered with DDOT staff who could divert traffic around the trail work and offer tree expertise.

"It almost feels like we're assisting them, and we're very grateful for it, because our attention is often pulled in a lot of different directions because we're managing trees all over the city," said O'Neill. "The end result is that the trail is maintained to a much higher standard than it would be otherwise."

That standard of care was evident as rangers guided the vine-wrangling cyclists along winding sections of the Anacostia Riverwalk and Marvin Gaye trails, pointing out invasive Bradford pear trees blooming with white flowers, offering assistance to those stopped on the trail, and removing trail obstructions – like an abandoned scooter.

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The D.C. Organizations Supporting Immigrant Families Amid the Federal Crackdown

The Young Center for Immigrant Children's Rights and Migrant Solidarity Mutual Aid provide immigrant families with support, services, and solidarity amid heightened ICE violence.

by Alexandra Menter

"They wanted to play chess," said Andrew Ortiz, a volunteer child advocate at The Young Center for Immigrant Children's Rights. The organization, with offices in 10 cities, including D.C., works with volunteers to visit unaccompanied immigrant children in government custody. Describing how the kids wish to spend their time together, Ortiz reiterates, "That's all they wanted."

Ortiz is part of a group of volunteers who visit unaccompanied immigrant children in government custody, remotely and in-person, describing how they want to spend their time together. The Young Center, a nonprofit with offices in 10 cities, including Washington, D.C., has seen high demand for its services supporting the growing number of these youth.

In the District, the support services offered by the Young Center are in high demand. U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement has arrested nearly 20,000 people in the D.C. area since the start of the second Trump administration, according to the Washington Post. The city's immigrant population—who make up 13.8 percent of the District's residents and 16.7 percent of the labor force, per the American

Immigration Council—remains highly vulnerable to arrests and deportation. Children, families, and new parents require particular support.

Across the country, more immigrant children, unaccompanied or otherwise, are being detained by ICE: Since 2025, the daily average number of detained youth jumped from 24 to 226, according to the Marshall Project. Migrant children are now spending more than six months on average in federal detention while they wait to be reunited with their families or other approved adults, Bloomberg Law reported. As of March, children in custody of the Office of Refugee Resettlement spent an average of 194 days until being discharged, per Bloomberg—an increase from 173 days in October 2025 and from 30 days in 2024 under the Biden administration.

Since January 2025, the Young Center has seen a roughly 20 percent increase in caseloads across all 10 cities, according to its 2026 Spring Impact Report. Its Volunteer Child Advocacy program continues to run at full capacity, admitting 1,400 new children each year.

After a clearance and training process to ensure adults are safe and reliable, volunteers with the Child Advocacy Program advocate for unaccompanied immigrant children in government custody, according to the Young Center website. Founded in 2004, the organization has supported more than 9,000 children in its 22 years of operation.

The children the Young Center serves are kept in shelters at undisclosed locations. “We’re not even allowed to share the addresses of the shelters ... it’s all confidential,” says Ortiz, a finance professional in D.C. who has volunteered with the organization since 2024.

“It’s a very structured environment with clear protocols,” Claudia Diamante, a health coach from D.C. and volunteer

**"AS MUCH AS WHAT WE DO IS
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child advocate for eight years, says of what the kids' day-to-day looks like. "They get up at [a specific] time, and then they [have] breakfast, and then they have classes. They have some time for leisure, but it also has to be scheduled."

Time spent in government custody can be traumatic for unaccompanied children, according to The Imprint. "One of the only solutions these children have is to self deport," says Macarena Torres, another child advocate volunteer and former U.S. Agency for International Development staffer. "They also have to represent themselves in immigration court and are treated as adults."

But, for one hour per week with the Young Center's volunteers, they're just children.

"As much as what we do is serious in terms of amplifying their voices and making them feel heard and seen, a lot of what we do is joyful and fun," says Emma Kemler, a Spanish teacher at Georgetown Day School. Kemler has volunteered at the Young Center for eight years. "We do Zumba, play games, we laugh, we watch telenovelas, listen to their favorite music, and sing karaoke."

Kemler says she continues to do this work because she doesn't want the children in these facilities to feel alone "in a system that really tries to break them down."

The Young Center isn't the only organization supporting

immigrant children in D.C. Migrant Solidarity Mutual Aid, a network of community organizations and volunteers that formed in April 2022, has also seen demand for its services increase and evolve since the second Trump administration began. Last year MSMA's perinatal team supported 69 mothers and babies through pregnancy, birth, and postpartum, according to its 2025 annual report. Volunteers delivered essential supplies and helped mothers enroll in health insurance and schedule doctor's appointments.

On January 20, 2025, the first day of Trump's second term, MSMA launched its ICE hotline, where people can report federal raids, request accompaniment to a court hearing, or locate their detained loved ones. Volunteers have fielded roughly 8,000 incoming calls, thousands of text messages, and more than 450 intakes from immigrants requesting legal referrals since the hotline opened, according to Benjamin "Benji" Rivera, a core volunteer organizer at MSMA. Volunteers also coordinated grocery deliveries rather than sending clients to stores as a way to minimize the risk of arrest or deportation.

"The needs change, and so does the work," says Rivera. "I'm a notary, so I've started notarizing people's power of attorney documentation in anticipation of deportations. That's a new need that's come up."

By adapting their services to local needs, MSMA continues the legacy of early immigrant support networks, such as La Clinica Del Pueblo, and the Hispanic Committee of Virginia, by advocating for immigrants through "solidarity, not charity," says Rivera. Unlike charity, which maintains an unequal power structure between those who provide aid and those who receive it, solidarity, Rivera explains, is a mutual partnership aimed at driving systemic change.

"Charity is people being given things in kind of an undignified way," Rivera says. "[Solidarity] goes beyond that. It's resources,

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services, and hope that if a person is able to get on their feet and establish themselves, then they could maybe give back later on. We've had some migrant folks that have gotten settled and become volunteers themselves."

Despite the hardships that go along with this work, volunteers are eager to continue their efforts, albeit under difficult circumstances.

"When you work with children one-on-one, it really underscores the humanity of this issue," says Kemler. "They are not political pawns. They're human beings with agency, desires, hopes, and dreams."

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Socialist Movement in DC Backs the Working Class

The Young Center An organizer with the Claudia Jones School talks about the District's history of international activism and solidarity and the Socialist candidates in its upcoming elections.

by Shedrick Pelt



Dante helps organize the annual Paul Robeson Peace & Justice Awards Gala in Washington DC. An event that honors grassroots organizers, community advocates, and independent journalists Credit: Shedrick Pelt.

The community organizing and social justice work currently being done in Washington, D.C., in response to Trump's second term as U.S. president is a continuation of the city's long legacy of defining pride and purpose through grassroots advocacy. Dr.

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Dante O'Hara, 34, an organizer with The Claudia Jones School for Political Education and a self-proclaimed Marxist, he finds himself stepping into the fight for justice — continuing the work of some of Washington, D.C.'s most influential progressive thinkers like Stokely Carmichael, former Mayor Marion Barry, and U.S. Rep. Eleanor Holmes Norton.

When he moved to D.C. in 2019, O'Hara became deeply involved in social movements operating against racism and big corporations while advocating for labor unions to protect workers. Guided by Socialist principles, he intentionally builds communities with numerous local hubs, organizing around issues like immigration, the Target boycott, the Cuba blockade, and Washington, D.C.'s Home Rule.

"[Claudia Jones's] teachings tell us that in any struggle, we have to fight for working-class leadership," said O'Hara.

He credits his friendship with the late Arturo Griffiths — founder



*Portrait of Dante O'Hara in Petworth, DC at the site of public art piece '(Here I Stand) In The Spirit of Paul Robeson' by Allen Uzikee Nelson
Credit: Shedrick Pelt.*



The continued boycott of the Target brand at its DC locations is organized by a coalition of grassroots and national organizations. Credit: Shedrick Pelt.

of Claudia Jones School and a significant figure in the Latino and immigrant community in D.C. — with helping him find his voice as an activist.

“Arturo was a political genius,” said O’Hara. “He mastered the science of struggle and understood the immediate problems the working class and, in particular, immigrants faced. Arturo knew how to build a mass movement and had the receipts to show for it.”

O’Hara shared more about his work with the Claudia Jones School, the District’s history of international activism and solidarity, and the Socialist candidates in D.C.’s upcoming elections.

The interview has been edited for length and clarity.

Shedrick Pelt: Tell us a little about yourself, the work you do, and what led you to this path of social justice work?

O’ Hara: I’m originally from California, a small beach town called Oceanside near San Diego. I was born and raised there. I’ve been in Washington, D.C., for more than six years. My focus is organizing predominantly around the themes of Black liberation, racism, immigrant rights, the fight for D.C.

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statehood and the defense of Home Rule. I've helped to secure affordable housing units in Ward 5's, Brookland Manor Apartments. In 2023, I worked with the DC Network for the U.S.-Cuba Normalization to help pass a DC Council resolution that urged the federal government to remove Cuba from the State Sponsors of Terrorism List.

I was in college at University of California when Occupy Wall Street took place during my sophomore year. I didn't really gravitate towards the movement, but I went to a few campus protests. The walls started to close in on me, politically, during the Black Lives Matter movement. That organization really started to make an impact after the murder of Michael Brown. Brown's murder challenged my Liberal perspective of police violence.

At that time, I did not have a clear understanding of how widespread police violence was against Black people in this country. I had the middle-class conception of "follow the law and do things right and you'll never get in trouble." Luckily, one of the only other Black students in the undergrad program helped me to better understand how the system violently policed Black and brown people.

After attending school at Ohio State University for its doctoral program, I decided to travel. This was around Trump's first term. I went to Costa Rica, Ecuador, Portugal, and Chiapas. During my time in Southern Mexico, I visited Indigenous areas, which is when I developed an interest in Marxism. I started reading a lot more from authors like Robin D.G. Kelly, Harry Heywood, who wrote "Black Bolshevik," Henry Winston, Paul Robeson, and Claudia Jones.

How does the legacy of Claudia Jones influence your work in Washington, D.C., today?

O' Hara: Claudia Jones was an Communist, theoretician, a journalist, organizer, and a cultural worker too. What we have done through the Claudia Jones School is lead our organizing

by putting the working class first. We ultimately stand against education that encourages a culture of exploitation and oppression. Instead, we uplift a working class culture of dignity, empowerment, freedom, and security.

We want people to become optimists for a world that we want to live in and will build in a post-Capitalist society. We aim to build cohorts of activists, organizers, community leaders, and more. Our primary objective is to build a democratic movement and to create the basis for a more militant class struggle for economic and political power in the District. We oppose capitalism through Marxist–Leninist ideology.

What are some common misconceptions people have about Communism and Socialism and their historical impact since the late 19th Century?

O' Hara: The most common misconception is that Socialism and Communism have never worked or that they have killed millions of people. Socialism simply means that workers take full power over the political, economic and social life of the country and wields the government in their favor.

In the Soviet Union, Socialism lasted over 70 years. Life expectancy and literacy rates increased. Uzbekistan, one of the most backward colonies of the Czarist empire, became one of the most advanced countries, producing some of the most engineers and scientists. Were there excesses and errors? Yes. But, the claims that Socialism murdered millions is inaccurate and peddled by fascist organizations like the Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation, which literally has funders who are heirs of former Nazis.

Cuba has made major strides in their medical system. During the COVID pandemic, they produced five vaccines. They send medical doctors all over the world in conflict zones and in poor countries to help provide medical assistance and training. During the fight for the liberation of Southern Africa, Cuba sent

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troops and doctors to support the people of Angola to defeat the Portuguese colonialists and to repel the fascist South African government who invaded the country. They also recently passed one of the most progressive policies regarding families with the Families Code. China has also become a major industrial power on the world stage and is currently in direct conflict and competition with the ruling class of the United States.

Are there any connections you see between organizing in the U.S. and political or social developments in places like Cuba?

O'Hara: In 2023, we had a coalition called D.C. Network for U.S. Cuba Normalization that included partners like Code Pink, Claudia Jones School, and several others. Their stated goal was, "We want our local government to have a say in the foreign policy of the country."

The DC Council has passed numerous bills going back to the 1980s on international issues. At that time, it was calling on South Africa to divest from its apartheid government. In the early 2000s, they passed a resolution denouncing the Iraq War. Later, they passed a resolution condemning Russia's invasion of Ukraine. In 2023, the council passed a resolution, taking a stand against the U.S. blockade on Cuba.

In 1984, Congressman Walter E. Fauntroy, Mary Frances Berry, and Randall Robinson staged a sit-in protest at the South African Embassy. I've seen photos of Stevie Wonder coming to Washington, D.C., and participating in civic actions. Also, South Africa divestment bills and resolutions of the 70s and 80s squeezed the government until they were overthrown by the democratic movement led by Nelson Mandela and the South African Communist Party.

What would a more just or equitable world look like to you, and what role — if any — do ideologies like Socialism or Communism play in that vision?

O' Hara: I believe that we need a full transformation and reconstruction of U.S. society, and the world's economic system. My frame of reference is my mother. She has gone through a lot since the recession in 2008. She almost lost my childhood home. She was chronically unemployed for many years. My father passed away from cancer when I was young. She was a single mom for many years and has dealt with debt and the crisis of our healthcare system. I want to believe in a just society where Black folks can breathe and feel free.

Working-class folks can have full dignity in their work. No wage gaps, no wage theft. Workers have more say in their workplaces to help create vibrant communities. No more big business exploitation and takeover of our communities. No more McDonald's and Starbucks. More local coffee shops led by or owned by Black and brown people. A world where immigrants feel safe as well. Abolish ICE, freedom of travel, free health care, and no more childhood poverty.

How is D.C. reacting to Socialist ideas?

O' Hara: There's already one sitting Socialist councilmember in our local D.C. Council, who is also running for mayor: Janeese Lewis George of Ward 4. I think it is a very exciting time to see the potential for the district to elect its first Socialist mayor. We also have the possibility for a Socialist to win the council seat in my area of Ward 1, and that is Aparna Raj.

Both are members of the Democratic Socialists of America, which is an organization that has made waves since the two presidential campaigns of Bernie Sanders and Rashida Tlaib, and, more recently, with the mayoral election of Zohran Mamdani in New York City. I think people are fed up with the two-party system and want an independent path, and it is up to Socialists and Communists to win them to the path of a true democracy, one that benefits all and not just the rich.

Given the early success of NYC Mayor Mamdani, what key

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issues should Janeese Lewis George prioritize during her first year in office if she is elected?

O' Hara: One issue I'd like to see her prioritize is the housing and utility affordability crisis. Take the power and monopoly out of the hands of the big real estate developers and big utility companies, who are squeezing the pockets of homeowners, renters, and small businesses. There has to be a willingness to take on these big business interests in the District.



It's been a year since the start of the nationwide Target Boycott and the retailer is feeling the pinch. A reported lose of 12.5 billion in market value and less people visiting their stores. Credit: Shedrick Pelt



A Second Chance, On Their Own Terms: Adult Learning Programs in Southeast DC Are Preparing Residents for Work

by Sade' Prue

Community College Preparatory Academy Charter School sits along an uphill stretch just off Good Hope Road in Southeast Washington, D.C. The building does not announce itself. It is easy to pass if you are unfamiliar with the neighborhood.

Inside, on a Wednesday morning in April, sunlight pours through wide windows that frame a wooded area to the west and offer a distant view of the Capitol to the east. Rows of desks line classrooms where computers display various software. In another room, work tables hold saws, screwdrivers, and gauges for construction and technical training.

The energy is steady but quiet as students prepare for spring break. A 21-year-old in a hoodie leans over a digital assignment. Across the hall, a woman, wearing work boots and a neon safety vest, flips through an HVAC instructional notebook. A young mother balances her workbook while checking her phone, managing responsibilities far beyond the classroom.

D.C. has a high school graduation challenge that exacerbates poor economic conditions in some communities. Citywide, 79% percent of high school students graduate on time, according to the nonprofit DC Action's DC Kids Count 2026, while in Ward 8 where Community College is located, that number drops to roughly 72%.

Wards 4, 7, and 8 see the highest rates of adult literacy issues

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and face “challenges rooted in limited access to essential educational resources, literacy programs, and workforce readiness training—barriers that hinder their ability to share in the District’s progress and opportunity,” per a Washington Literacy Center report released April 17. Communities east of the Anacostia River also have some of the highest unemployment rates in the District and the lowest incomes, according to the D.C. Department of Employment Services.

D.C. government officials think they have found one answer to both challenges: adult learning programs. It has supported schools like the Academy of Hope, Carlos Rosario, Goodwill Excel Center, Briya, and the Washington Literacy Center, which provide flexible opportunities that reconnect adult learners to earning a diploma, strengthen literacy skills, and support career-focused education and work readiness.

Community College Preparatory Academy is one of two such schools located east of the river, serving adult learners who are undercredited, underprepared, or disconnected from traditional education pathways. School leaders and students I spoke with there said that many high school dropouts didn’t abandon their formal education because they lacked ability. Many left because of family responsibilities, unstable housing, financial hardship, and trauma.

“I dropped out in the 11th grade. I made good grades. Life just happened,” said Ursula Ware, a 39-year-old mother of two children and a DC resident.

In 2002, Ware was forced to care for her mother, who was left disabled after a workplace injury. Keeping her family afloat became a primary preoccupation. “I felt like it was my responsibility. I dropped out, started working, and just kept moving,” said Ware.

She has worked a variety of jobs while raising children and

“I’M ABOUT TO BE 40, AND I GOT ACCEPTED TO COLLEGE. PEOPLE THINK IT’S TOO LATE — IT’S NOT”

attempting to maintain stability with a high school diploma, but said the weight of limited options eventually became impossible to ignore. “I was lying on resumes, saying I graduated, saying I took college classes...whatever I had to do to get the job.”

“I worked good jobs, but I kept falling into the same cycle,” she added. “I was super depressed for a long time. I knew I needed something different.”

In 2025, she discovered Community College Preparatory Academy, which offers GED preparation and career pathways in healthcare, construction, information technology, and office administration — all tuition-free.

“Free is important,” Ware told me. “Especially when you’re on a fixed income, and you have two kids. Free matters.”

Since then, she has passed three of the four GED exams and is preparing to complete math this spring. She has also been accepted into dual enrollment at Bay Atlantic University, where she plans to study political science and international relations.

Initially, Ware thought she might establish a career in healthcare. Now, she sees herself in policy advocacy, using her voice to support families and communities across the city.

“I’m about to be 40, and I got accepted to college. People think it’s too late — it’s not,” she said.

Just like Ware, many of the school instructors know firsthand what it means to step away from education and later return.

“When I came back, I realized it was not that I did not want to learn. I just did not know how to learn the right way,” said

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LaTarsha Kelly, an instructor at the school who once stepped away from education herself.

“CC Prep is like a rose that grows from concrete,” continued Kelly. “It is a place that welcomes people who have been overlooked and gives them room to grow.”

In many ways, that is what makes adult learning programs unique: they are built not simply to help people find work, but to help them imagine a future that once felt out of reach, while also providing the career support and guidance needed to get there.

“Most of our learners are not just looking for a job, they are looking for a career,” said Gerald Konohia, Community College Preparatory Academy’s chief executive officer. “They want to know how to get there.”

Christian Nobel, an employment specialist at the Academy, said that support begins immediately. “They may have the technical skills, but we also focus on soft skills — how to communicate, how to work with others — because that is what sustains employment,” Nobel said.

Ware said Academy staff and instructors helped her “with my resume, my cover letter, my LinkedIn — everything. They made me feel like I could really do this.”

Ware is still balancing motherhood, bills, and uncertainty. Now, however, she sees possibility where she once only saw survival.

“People think second chances are small,” Ware said. “Sometimes, second chances change everything.”



The Lasting Legacy of Woody Ward: A Quiet Force Still Shaping Ward 7

The Decades after quietly mentoring Ward 7 youth at Benning Park, Woody Ward's influence still anchors a renamed rec center and offers a blueprint for today's D.C. communities.

by Beverly F. Smith

In a time when Washington, D.C.'s Ward 7 faced some of its toughest challenges, one recreation center staff member quietly became a lifeline for hundreds of young people searching for safety, guidance, and hope.

Woody Ward was a mentor, protector, and consistent presence for young people during the 1980s and 1990s, when many communities across Southeast D.C. were grappling with rising violence, poverty, and limited opportunities for youth. Raymond Beale, who grew up going to the recreation center during that era, said it was a place where people gathered to survive, to learn, and to be seen.

"Mr. Ward was a father figure for a lot of kids who didn't have a father figure around. I know because he was someone that I looked up to during my teenage years to see how a man was supposed to behave," Beale said.

Ward's approach was simple, but powerful. Over his 47-year career at DC Parks and Recreation, he showed up and built meaningful relationships with the youth who walked through those doors.

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"He made sure we had access to all sports. Whether by organizing sports, keeping the gym open past normal hours, or simply listening, he created an environment where structure and compassion worked hand in hand," said Coach O, who grew up in the area while Ward worked at the rec center. "He was definitely a pillar in the community and I am glad they renamed the rec to honor him."

Community advocate Ebbon A. Allen grew up blocks away from the recreation center, where he spent his youth. After graduating from Morehouse College, he returned to work under Ward's leadership, coaching the Benning Park basketball team.

"When I asked Mr. Ward if I could start a boys basketball team, he said I had to be dedicated and consistent," Allen recalled. "He held me accountable and helped me wear many hats outside of coaching basketball at Benning Park Recreation Center. I later found out he was also the director of Benning Terrace Recreation Center, where he worked with my older brother, 'Squirt,' and supported his basketball career."

Ward was born in Washington, Pennsylvania, and moved to the District in the early 1960s, according to a 2019 ANC 7E recommendation to rename the Benning Park Recreation Center after him. In 1964, he graduated from Maryland Eastern Shore with a Bachelor of Arts in Recreation in order to pursue his love for sports and recreation and was accepted to play for the Buffalo Bills the following year. Ward left the NFL when he was injured in 1966, but his love of sports persisted through his work with DCPR's youth sports programs, including the Woody Ward Basketball League.

"Due to his many years of outstanding and dedicated community service and interaction, he was a well known and highly respected member of the Benning Park community," the ANC 7E resolution reads.

“WARD’S LEGACY SHOWED THAT YOU CAN DO ANYTHING YOU PUT YOUR MIND TO”

In 2019, Benning Park Recreation Center was officially renamed the Woody Ward Recreation Center to honor his decades of quiet, transformative work.

Allen, who became the ANC for 7E03, led efforts to rename the rec center in Ward’s honor. He said today, many young people walk into the building without knowing the story behind its namesake.

“It was important that his name be on that building. People need to know who he was and what he did for this community,” Allen said. “There’s a whole new generation that doesn’t know. But they’re benefiting from what he built, even if they don’t realize it.”

Former ANC 7E Chairman Delia Houseal, who also played a role in drafting the resolution, said that it was an honor to present the request and that “Councilmember Gray and his team were eager to put forth the resolution to have the name changed.”

Ward died in 2017, but his legacy lives on through youth and local organizations that carry forward his mission. Ward gave the nonprofit I founded, Momma’s Safe Haven, its first opportunity to host a Black history talent show — an event that continues to this day. In February, we hosted “Momma’s Safe Haven’s 13th Annual Black History Talent Show,” where Marque Harris, a 12-year-old Benning Park resident, said that he was honored to portray Mr. Ward.

“Ward’s legacy showed that you can do anything you put your mind to,” Marque said.

Many of the youth Ward mentored have gone on to become

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leaders, parents, and community advocates — carrying forward the same values of guidance, accountability, and care. Today, as communities across D.C. continue to confront challenges such as youth violence, mental health struggles, and economic hardship, the model that Woody Ward embodied remains as relevant as ever.

“He knew us by name. He knew our families. He paid attention,” Allen recalled. “That’s what made the difference.”

Ward’s legacy reflects what communities still need: relationships, consistency, and presence. For those who walk through the doors of Woody Ward Recreation Center today, his impact may not always be visible — but it is there. And for those who remember, it is undeniable.

“Woody Ward changed lives,” said Allen. “And his legacy is still shaping this community today.”

This article was originally published by The Afro on July 28th, 2026.



ICE Presence Chills Columbia Heights' Vibrant Farmer's Market

by Dancer Sze

When D.C. residents think of the Columbia Heights neighborhood, delicious food smells, upbeat vendor culture, and vibrant music being played on street corners may come to mind. But over the last eight months, those who live and work in the area have noticed a stark shift in atmosphere as President Donald Trump has amped up immigration enforcement in the District and across the country.

People typically convene at the Columbia Heights Civic Plaza throughout the week, and some start their weekends at FreshFarm farmer's market, which takes place there on Saturday mornings as well as Wednesday afternoons. However, an increase in immigration-related arrests near the market has disrupted this community routine.

Jillian Everly, a market operator who is starting her second main season at Columbia Heights on Saturdays, said this year she noticed a shift almost immediately.

"A lot of the community [was] starting to stay inside and not go out unless they had to," Everly said. "We've had vendors stop coming. The amount of people showing up used to be in the high 80s and 90s every half an hour. I've been doing some tracking of the numbers this year and it's significantly lower, sometimes half that."

When Trump retook office last year, he immediately moved to crack down on illegal immigration. In March 2025, he signed

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an executive order that established the D.C. Safe and Beautiful Task Force, mandating “maximum enforcement of Federal immigration law” and redirecting “available Federal, State, or local law enforcement resources to apprehend and deport illegal aliens in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area.” In August, he declared a crime emergency in the District and mandated the Metropolitan Police Department coordinate with federal forces.

The District set up an emergency operations center in response to the orders, and in September 2025 D.C. Mayor Muriel Bowser issued an order that extended its coordination with federal agencies including the FBI, the U.S. Park Police, the DEA and the Secret Service. Led by the U.S. Marshals Service, in collaboration with 28 federal agencies and MPD, the Task Force has been responsible for nearly 20,000 arrests between January 2025 and March 2026 in the D.C. area, per an investigation by the Washington Post, and despite the stated purpose of “securing our borders,” more than 60% of those arrested have no criminal record.

“This whole experience is unreal,” said Reverend Julio Hernandez, a D.C. native and executive director of the Congregation Action Network. “People don’t want to go to the market, people can’t go to the pharmacy, people can’t go to the park or church. We are seeing dropout rates increase too because kids are scared to go to school.”

Everly said she has witnessed multiple instances where the market was disrupted by customers trying to intervene in ICE abductions that were taking place in plain view.

“A lot of people were scared to go [out] in the morning because that’s when it seemed they were the most out and about, hoping no one would see them snatching and taking people,” Everly said.

“WHAT WE ARE WITNESSING IS NOT ONLY THE DESTRUCTION OF FAMILY BONDS BUT THE DESTRUCTION OF SOCIAL FABRICS IN OUR COMMUNITIES”

Hernandez and Everly both said this has created a climate of fear and confusion. The prospect of sudden abduction, detention, and even deportation if one steps outside tears the social fabric of migrant communities, according to Hernandez, and their withdrawal from neighborhood routines like the farmer's market weakens community bonds.

“It's heartbreaking when you lose friends because they're afraid to come to the market because of ICE,” Everly said. “People are afraid they're going to be deported and taken away from their family.”

Fear of separation is also keeping migrant families from accessing support for navigating food assistance programs, making them less accessible to growing, lower-income families. In 2025 about 18% of Latine households used the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), according to the Post.

Besides accepting SNAP and Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) benefits at the market, FreshFarm offers its own food assistance programs including Produce Plus, FreshMatch, Free Summer Meals and the Senior Farmer's Market Nutrition Program. However, fear of leaving home to pick up fresh food and not making it back seems to be deterring some people from coming to the market to use these programs.

“There was a period of time when we wouldn't see any Spanish-speaking people at our market to get the benefits they need,” Everly said. “These are good benefits and people really

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need them considering everything is getting more expensive and people need to afford their rent.”

There are ripple effects from fewer people accessing initiatives like Produce Plus and FreshMatch, which help users buy fresh produce, according to Everly.

“If less people are using those incentives, local farmers are directly affected,” Everly said. “If they can’t make a profit, how are they supposed to keep their farms going? How are we supposed to get sustainable food?”

The impact of this breakdown in community safety will most likely be felt for years to come, according to Hernandez.

“What we are witnessing is not only the destruction of family bonds but the destruction of social fabrics in our communities,” Hernandez said. “This is what bonds us together. The farmers market is a great opportunity [for that]. Play is so important. Socializing is so important. We are social beings.”

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