

I SAW! DC™ SUMMER 2013 PROJECT FINAL REPORT

By Quentina Johnson



Overview:

For three summers, I SAW! DC™ youth leaders, ages 13-21, from wards one through eight--- participated in field research with historians and mentors to highlight the historical significance of early 19th African American communities in Georgetown as well as extended areas of D.C. Our youth researchers produce a multimedia video documentary and research presentations.

I SAW! DC™ began as a small grassroots youth led community based education research program. The purpose of our program is to engage the creativity of diverse youth emerging from a background of historical and social challenges in a vigorous process which aims to cultivate an intelligence that will find innovative ways to benefit society as well as inspire academic talent development.

In many ways we are the little engine that could. Through experiential learning our young creative scholars develop leadership skills to initiate inter-generational research projects focused in the humanities using interdisciplinary approaches to address an area of need in their local community. Our current 2013 youth multimedia interactive project is online to view <http://isawdc.org/i-saw-dc-2013-summer-youth-community-project.html>.

Personal Narrative by Lead Youth Researcher:

My name is Khari Eyen Zame Johnson and I am a 17 year old DC high school junior. During the 2010 fall of my ninth grade year, age 14, I initiated research in the current ongoing I SAW! DC™ youth led research project, "A History Beneath Us...Sacred Ground Across the River Creek, © " to honor the legacy and history of early African Americans buried in the 200 year old burial ground of Mt. Zion Female Union Band Cemetery.



This research has bestowed an integral meaning to my life and I have gain a mind awakening experience from it as well as the honor of knowing an elder historian, Mr. Bowman who is an inspiration to me. I have not had a relationship to know my own father, yet, this project has given me the ability to see a powerful example of a man who loves and protects his legacy and community.

I became involved in the project, three years ago when walking through Rock Creek Park on a path by a small bridge over a river creek, I saw a plaque about the African American burial ground--Mt. Zion Female Union Band Cemetery and I felt a connection to the creek and the soil where I knew enslaved and freed ancestors of African Americans in DC rested.

It was raining. Yet, I had to see the burial ground of those ancestors who shared the lineage and history of my blood and skin. So I had to walk on the trail taking me farther up the hill. As it rained more and more, I stepped over slippery rocks through the trees. Before I began the upward climb on the hill made path, I placed my stone in the womb of a tree hollowed out and filled with stones of different shapes, sizes and colors near the bottom of the trail.

There was no sign post beside it but I knew it must have been important because so many hands had placed stones inside of the trunk so I knew it was important to pay the same respect. It was still raining when I made my way up and stood at the top of the hill on sacred ground and took in the feelings of a kinship with the lives that lived before me and felt those ancestors should be remembered and honored. I also felt I needed to know who they were to understand an important part of myself I felt missing in understanding my own history. Who am I? What African part of me is lost in the shadows of America? I closed my eyes and felt the love of a resilient people whose spirit refuses to die and I felt I was standing in the gap of time. Afterwards, I looked around my surroundings and realized that cemetery I came up the path from the woods of Rock Creek Park to find had another side that was hidden in the back of apartments from a main road in Georgetown.

I walked on Q Street and O Street many times and never knew the African American history that was blocked from my view behind those buildings. The research project of early African American communities is important for us as youth to know our connection to the struggles and triumphs of people of African descent and to never allow them to become invisible and forgotten because if we do --we lose the powerful lessons of the past and then we ourselves are lost. My goal is to lead other youth in researching the identities of the community buried at Mt. Zion Female Union Band Cemetery to honor and pay tribute their lives. My question is always, what can we as youth learn about our own true potential when we uncover and honor the historical legacy of DC's earliest communities of African Americans?



DC is shifting its landscape as gentrification threatens the cultural diversity and rich cultural legacy of our nation's capital. Yet, our population of youth from birth to 21 years old is still overwhelmingly African American. However, we appear to be invisible in the back drop of restaurants and condominiums as our role in the shaping of DC's history is minimized or our continued presence is marginalized and criminalized.

Must it be assumed when we as youth congregate and walk down the street at night to be up to no good as though we should still abide by DC's Black codes? Is our destiny in our own hands when we allow our lives to be defined by a lingering ignorance of our own legal, political and social history?



Outcomes:

Overall, the 2013 program was successful-- global connections were made with Afro-descendants from South America researching their own legacy and heritage in the early history of their country eager to learn and exchange shared histories. An interactive online program guide was produced by I SAW! DC™ highlighting the project's themes and research.

The youth researchers produced high quality interactive multimedia presentations on their historical research on the internet for a global outreach and there was a significant amount of positive feedback from community members and parents as well as surveys reflecting that the youth participants and audience members had little or no knowledge of the legacy of African Americans in Georgetown until becoming involved with the project. The multimedia video documentary and research presentations demonstrated that youths valued their interaction with members of 15th Street Presbyterian Church and Mt. Zion's historian Mr. Bowman, Mr. Vernon Ricks and Pastor Rev. Cogman. Also, youths considered the history of African Americans in Georgetown as well as the extended areas in DC reflective to the challenges and triumphs they faced today with parallels between the Black Codes, racial profiling and the Stop and Frisk laws. The youths also saw the success of the church communities raising money to purchase enslaved persons' freedom, fund education and schools, owned property and independently achieve success despite being formerly enslaved persons.



Surveys & Evaluations Data:

(Available Upon Request)



Summary:

We have had very successful programming thus far and have demonstrated it with evidenced based data, yet one of our greatest challenges has been sustainable funding. In fact, this year we operated with less than half the youths we usually serve and had only one full-time staff member who mostly contributed many volunteer hours and still face the task of fundraising to meet our summer budget shortfall.

❖ **In 2012, we received a total \$25,500 grant funding** for programming beginning May through March with 30 enrolled youths participating in daily field research trips, leadership development and workshops. The budget met the financial obligations of two full-time summer teachers with reduce salaries donated to in kind services, supplies, a dance teacher, a music teacher, Spoken Word performance company providing poetry workshops, oral historian consultant, civil war historian honoraria, weekly lectures and tours by DC historian, bus company for bi-weekly transportation, film production company, leadership training with GW University, youth social activism boot camp and six youths received outstanding award stipends.

❖ **This summer in 2013 we received \$3,800 grant** for programming beginning June through August thereby we had to reduce enrollment to 14 youth participants with a \$600 donation from Sistas United toward bus transportation rental. Therefore, total amount of funding received for 2013 summer budget was \$4,400.

❖ **Yet, the total budget 2013 summer was \$10,556, and it includes:**

- ✓ \$1,250 for bus transportation rental (4 trips)
- ✓ \$1,000 for project historian field trips and tours
- ✓ \$5,400 reduced salary for one full time teacher/program director 10 weeks (regular DC summer school teacher salary \$35 per hour reduced to \$19.50 per hour)
- ✓ \$1000 lease summer space at (2 sites @ \$500 Mt. Zion + \$500 15th Street Presbyterian Church)
- ✓ \$1000 lease summer space at (2 sites @ \$500 Mt. Zion + \$500 15th Street Presbyterian Church)
- ✓ \$450 Spoken word performance company workshop
- ✓ \$113 GW summit leadership training
- ✓ \$495 weekly local metro & transportation
- ✓ \$400 outstanding youth research award (\$100 per 4 youths)
- ✓ \$150 youth video editor stipend
- ✓ \$150 video camera equipment & supplies
- ✓ \$50 ink & copies
- ✓ \$88 (added insurance)
- ✓ \$160 phone/internet/web based newsletter

❖ **As a result, the 2013 budget shortfall is \$6, 306.** Currently, we are fundraising to seek at least a matching grant for the **\$3,800** grant awarded by the Diverse City for the summer program as well as a business sponsor or community to help with remaining amount of **\$2, 506.**