

**Who's a Washingtonian?
Young Professionals Series
Washington, DC
2005-present**

Introduction

In many ways, the city of Washington can be seen as undergoing an extraordinary renaissance. City government has had stable leadership, balanced budgets and surpluses for several years. Downtown is alive with restaurants, theaters and shopping. Baseball is closer to coming to D.C. than it has been in many years, and waterfront development, touted by progressive cities everywhere as a hallmark of a city's renewal, is also being planned. New and restored housing is being sold at top prices. Yet pockets of pain exist: aging school buildings and libraries, concentrated crime in poor areas, tell another story and reveal a different Washington.

Program Summary

Since 2005 the Humanities Council of Washington, D.C., has convened community members, scholars, and young professionals interested or engaged in local historic preservation efforts for civic reflection conversations centering on the question, *Who is a Washingtonian?* Facilitators attend pre-conversation briefings to discuss methods for approaching the readings and for encouraging open communication on such questions as *Whose Washington is it anyway? Is it necessary to identify with my neighbor? With the stranger in my midst?* and *What are the rights and responsibilities of citizenship?* The Council conceived of this series as a way to broaden participants' ideas about historic preservation, build greater understanding of other perspectives on the life and future of the city, and promote civic reflection as a resource for future community organizing.

Audience

A diverse group of young professionals in Washington, D.C.

Guiding Questions

- Who is a Washingtonian?
- Whose Washington is it anyway?
- How will I find my place in the New Washington?
- What are the rights and responsibilities of citizenship?
- Is it necessary to identify with my neighbor? With the stranger in my midst?
- Is it so difficult to value the old? To embrace change?
- Can I listen, learn and lead?

Readings

- Langston Hughes, "Democracy" (poem)
- "Oath of Athenian Youth" (anonymous)

- Paul Dunbar, “Accountability” (poem)
- Scott Russell Sanders, “The Geography of Somewhere” (speech)

Feedback

Initially funded by a seed grant from the Project on Civic Reflection, the Young Professionals series has expanded with the continuing support of the D.C. Humanities Council. In their report on the grant’s impact, a Council staff member wrote: *Ours is a politicized city; there are many barriers to creating a unity, understanding, openness and cooperation. Many participants reported that civic reflection discussions have allowed them to meet their neighbors and understand them better. For some, it has really broken down a sense of isolation in the city. I am very proud of this and happy that the council has gained a younger and appreciative new audience.*