

Testimony by
Bernard Demczuk, Professor of African American History & Culture
at The School Without Walls for the
DC Zoning Commission
October 30, 2006

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of the School Without Walls - George Washington University Partnership. My name is Bernard Demczuk. I work at GW. As part of the programmatic partnership between GW and Walls, I teach African American History & Culture at the School Without Walls and coordinate the School's Black Cinema Club. My course surveys the 450 year experience of Africans in the Americas and African Americans in American history & culture.

I have taught at Walls for four years but I have previously been a guest lecturer at Walls since 1995 lecturing on DC and African American history & culture. As such, I am one small part of the educational partnership between GW and Walls.

My course concentrates on the 17th, 18th and 19th Centuries. We concentrate on studying the beginnings of the African diaspora's experience in the New World. We study the Middle Passage & slavery in the Caribbean in the 17th Century, the British legal and social construction of race in the 18th Century, slavery in North America, its resistance and its abolition, the Civil War Era, Reconstruction, post-Reconstruction in the 19th Century and Jim Crow in the 20th. That covers, essentially, the years 1500 - 1950. We only spend a small amount of time on the Modern Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s & 1960s and no time in the post-Civil Rights Era. *Finis Origae Pendent*, "The end depends upon the beginning" goes the Latin method of teaching history. The more my students understand the beginnings of their ancestors' experiences in America, the more they can understand themselves and the social-economic culture in which they live, struggle and succeed.

ZONING COMMISSION
District of Columbia

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I challenge my students to enjoy learning no matter what the physical conditions are in their classroom. I do not want to hear their complaints about their ceiling falling in on their heads. I tell them to move their chairs to avoid the falling debris. I do not want to hear about the cold coming in from old, drafty, inadequate windows. Wear a second sweater, I tell them. I don't want to hear about the classroom being unbearably hot in the warm months or too cold in February. The worst the conditions, actually, the better I like it. I remind them of the learning conditions that WEB Dubois and Sojourner Truth, Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs, Carter G. Woodson and Olaudah Equiano had to endure, yet they learned splendidly, went on to write great books and excelled in their fields. Did Frederick Douglass have air-conditioning on the Wye Plantation where he was enslaved and learned to read clandestinely? So I show them the slave shack that Carter G. Woodson learned in yet earned his PhD from Harvard.

My Walls students love learning no matter what the conditions. They will not be *mis-educated*, a reference to Woodson's seminal work, *The Mis-Education of the Negro* which they study. Apparently the ANC believes that School Without Walls students should not enjoy the benefits of a partnership with GW, that is, advanced intellectual rigor. Is this, in fact, the view of 10,000 Foggy Bottom residents, 150 local businesses, two dozen non-profits and churches that reside in the neighborhood? I think not.

My students do not understand the exclusionary attitudes of persons living in one of the premier neighborhoods of our city, yet oppose progress to help our DC public school students. As quoted by ANC Commissioner Anne Savage in the *NW Current* last week, "Just as students at the SWW have survived a school that is falling apart, some of the residents have been surviving a neighborhood that is falling apart." Falling apart? Foggy Bottom? The Foggy Bottom neighborhood continues to be one of the most desirable communities in which to live on the East Coast, let alone DC!

As a teacher at Walls, I support the partnership between Walls and GW. With a new facility, we can have more students taking more classes from GW professors, thereby, furthering the education of more high school students in the District. And that's a good thing.

Thank you.

Bernard Demczuk

PhD Candidate, African American History & Culture at GWU

202.251.1975

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BOTTOM CURRENT

ANC battles school/dorm proposal

By JULIE WESTFALL
Current Staff Writer

The Foggy Bottom-West End advisory neighborhood commission rejected a joint School Without Walls/George Washington University proposal to renovate the crumbling high school and build a university dormitory behind it last week, amid continuing dissension over the university's vast 20-year development plans.

"Just as students at the School Without Walls have survived a school that is falling apart, some of the residents have been surviving a neighborhood that is falling apart," said commissioner Anne Savage before the 4-2 vote.

James Morris and David Lehrman opposed the resolution, which said the proposed 192,000-square-foot See Walls/Page 7



Bill Petros/The Current

A deal with the university would mean \$12 million to redevelop School Without Walls.