

NOT TO BE MISSED

6. True Reformer Building  
(1200 U Street, NW)

“The True Reformers led the way for U Street to become a main street for black Washingtonians,” stated a local historian. The United Order of True Reformers, a Richmond-based fraternal benevolent society catering to African Americans, built its headquarters on U Street in 1903. The building contained centers for vocational training, a drill room used by Washington’s Black National Guard and entertainment halls where Duke Ellington’s first band preformed. In 1917, when the Knights of Pythias purchased the building as their temple, the two-thousand-seat auditorium became a popular dance hall and, later, a gymnasium for the Metropolitan Police Boys Club #2. The recently renovated building now houses the African American Civil War Museum and Visitors Center.



True Reformer Building.  
*Courtesy of the Library of  
Congress HABS/HAER/HALS.*

7. Whitelaw Hotel  
(1839 13<sup>th</sup> Street, NW)

The city’s only first-class hotel and apartment building for African Americans opened in 1919. The Whitelaw Hotel was named for the African American who designed it, John Whitelaw Lewis, and featured twenty-one hotel rooms and twenty-seven apartments, an elegant lobby under a stained-glass ceiling, a banquet-size dining room and a magnificent ballroom. Lewis sold shares to Africans Americans to raise money to build the hotel, explaining, “They can see buildings towering skyward and say to the world, this is what we have gotten out of prosperity.” Referred to as “the Embassy” by such guests as Joe Louis, George Washington Carver and Louis Armstrong, the Whitelaw

Mt. Vernon Square, Shaw and U Street, NW

hosted many formal dances and debutante balls. When the neighborhood declined by the 1960s, the hotel was abandoned. In 1991, the old hotel was restored as an apartment building for middle- and lower-income residents and as a community resource for public events.



Whitelaw Hotel. *Courtesy of the Library of  
Congress HABS/HAER/HALS.*

8. Carter Woodson House  
(1538 9<sup>th</sup> Street, NW)

The Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, founded in 1915, was the heart and soul of Carter Woodson’s life’s work. Wishing to convince the world of the importance of understanding the culture, contributions and origins of African Americans, he also founded the *Journal of Negro History* and established Negro History Week in 1926. The son of former slaves, Woodson became the second African American to receive a doctorate from Harvard University. Woodson’s residence, used by the association until 1971, fell into disrepair. In 2006, the National Park Service purchased it, but funding for its restoration has not yet been forthcoming.

9. O Street Market  
(7<sup>th</sup> Street at O Street, NW)

A new farmer’s market, called Northern Market, opened in 1888, four blocks north of Mt. Vernon Square. Most of the first vendors were German immigrants, but over the years the neighborhood changed and by the 1960s most vendors were African Americans. The old market was damaged in the 1968 riots and closed. In the 1980s, it was partly restored, but a heavy wet snow caused the roof to collapse in 2003. Plans currently exist to incorporate the remaining exterior walls into a new neighborhood supermarket.

