

The Tube

CONTRIBUTED STORY
FOR THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Duke Ellington's Washington, a new PBS documentary, tell the often overlooked but significant history of the influential African-American community that flourished in Washington, D.C. in the early 20 century, nurturing such shining talents as hometown jazz legend Duke Ellington, Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall, poets Paul Laurence Dunbar and Langston Hughes, Civil rights activist Mary Church Terrell and pioneering surgeon Charles Drew.

Historians regard Washington D.C. as the cultural capital of black American, less than a mile from the White House, cite this dynamic community, before the Harlem Renaissance. Over time, with its famed Howard Theater and many other nightspots, Washington's Uptown area became a Mecca for jazz, Washington's U Street "the black Broadway."

Although Uptown, now know as Shaw, fell into decline in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, it is now enjoying a comeback by drawing upon its illustrious past.

Duke Ellington's Washington, which tells both the past and present of this African American community, will premiere nationwide on PBS on Monday, February 7, 2000 at 10 p.m. ET (check local listings) as a feature of Black History Month. The hour-long program was created by award-winners Hedrick Smith, as executive producer and correspondent, and Stanley Nelson, as producer and director. "Washington's Uptown community sent a stream of talented African Americans into the nation at large and thus had a

OPB program displays Duke Ellington's Washington



far-flung influence for decades, says Hedrick Smith. "It's a cultural center with a special and important history - not far off the well-beaten tourist path along Pennsylvania Avenue from the White House to Congress - but few people know about it

because its story has not been well-told. Now, thanks to a coalition of private and government efforts, most of its fabled past is being revitalized and restored for all to see."

(Please see 'Ellington' page 5)

Photographer Rupert H. McNeill documented the daily life of an influential African-American community that flourished in Washington D.C. in the early 20th Century.

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