



with the African-American community. Each year, on the King holiday weekend, the pastor of Turner Memorial A.M.E. Church (now housed in Adas's last downtown sanctuary) comes and preaches a sermon at Friday night services, their choir sings, and we enjoy a Shabbat meal together. On the following Sunday, we go to Turner Memorial, our rabbi preaches at their service, our choir sings, and we enjoy Sunday dinner with them.

So here is our place to pray, teach, learn, help others, and socialize. Our motto of "patronize your local synagogue" is still right for us.

*Raymond and Pearl Kruger have been married for 49 years and have lived for the last 21 years in the District of Columbia. They have been singing in Zemer Chai, Washington's Jewish community chorus, for 21 years. They have three daughters, four grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren. Ray is now a sculptor and a docent at the Corcoran Gallery of Art. Pearl is a tour guide at the Kennedy Center.*

## Haroset and Hoecake: The African-American/ Jewish Seder in D.C.

by Michael Twitty

Each year I join other African Americans and Jewish Americans of Shiloh Baptist Church and Adas Israel Congregation for a Seder in celebration of freedom and our commitment to social justice. Coming as families, activists, clergy, and students, some 400–500 people a year participate in one of the largest African-American/Jewish Seders in the nation. It is part of

a tradition that began in D.C., in 1968, when Rabbi Arthur Waskow and other Jews involved in the Civil Rights Movement held a "Freedom Seder" incorporating common themes of struggle. Each year, Adas Israel, Shiloh Baptist, and the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith work together to sponsor the event.

The Seder is only one example of cultural democracy at work in African-American/Jewish coalition building in Washington. *Common Quest* magazine is a joint project between Howard University's Afro-American Studies Department and the American Jewish Committee. Operation

Understanding brings African-American and Jewish students together for holidays, trips, and dialogues. American and Howard universities offer jointly taught courses on the history and contemporary relevance of African-American/Jewish relations.

The Seder occurs approximately two weeks before the actual Passover, and the congregations alternately

host the evening. When Shiloh hosts, it is the rare occasion when a *mashgiach* (inspector) supervises the preparation of food to insure it is kosher. When Adas Israel hosts, it is the only time of the year when cornmeal and raw greens are prepared for ritual consumption.

Central to the Seder is the use of symbolic foods. Matzo and hoecake sit side by side as breads of poverty and affliction. Parsley is wed with collard greens, symbolizing the bitterness of oppression. Salt water reminds us of both the tears of the Israelites and the waters of the Atlantic during the Middle Passage. Tasting *haroset* (a mixture of apples, nuts, and wine symbolizing mortar) and hoecake, I am reminded that in both traditions food expresses the soul. I savor roast chicken, matzo ball soup, and *tzimmes* (a sweet

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vegetable dish) made with sweet potatoes.

Everything is intertwined. Rabbi Jeffrey Wohlberg and Pastor Charles Smith both lead the ceremony. The opening song of the Seder is “Go Down Moses,” a shared expression of pain and promise. African-American and Jewish children sing the four questions of the Seder, in English and Hebrew. In the Haggadah or Passover narrative, prophets from Abraham Joshua Heschel to Martin Luther King, Jr., foretell a peaceful age. Jewish and African-American songs bleed into each other, “Dayenu” and “Oh Freedom.” At the end, the *hallel*, or songs of praise, are “We Shall Overcome” and “Lift Every Voice and Sing.”

Why do I return each year?  
It’s satisfying to see old  
friends from past Seders and  
new faces, all of us savoring  
the gift of freedom. With  
affection, I call it the “Soul  
Food” Seder.

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## The Ubiquitous Poetry of Washington, D.C.

by *Kenneth Carroll*

The official history of poetry in Washington is told primarily by its scholars and formal institutions. Since the 1800s the Library of Congress has been a magnet pulling the great poets of the world to our city. Universities like Howard,

Georgetown, American, and George Washington have also hosted their share of poets. But the true story of Washington poetry is found in the neighborhoods where poets lived and the everyday lives of people they witnessed. Poets like Georgia Douglas Johnson, May Miller, Sterling Brown, and Jean Toomer all found considerable inspiration in the neighborhoods and the people

who inhabited them. Johnson’s weekly “S Street Salon” hosted the likes of Toomer, Countee Cullen, Langston Hughes, and Angelina Grimke, who often introduced new works there.

Today, in addition to its vibrant written literary tradition, D.C. has become one of the most exciting cities for spoken-word poets and performers. Why is understandable if we examine two important D.C. community institutions that were born in the 1970s.

“It was when I began ‘The Poet and the Poem’ that I learned how ubiquitous poetry was in Washington, D.C.,” relates Grace Cavalieri, founder and host of the ground-breaking radio program that has captured the ears and hearts of Washington-area poetry lovers for 20 years on Pacifica outlet WPFW 89.3 FM. What Cavalieri discovered when she opened the airwaves for poets