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Endangered in Anacostia

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4–5 minutes

Early on the morning of Oct. 9, Diamond Teague was shot in the head and killed while standing on his family's front porch in the District.

The local media didn't consider the murder of a 19-year-old African American from Anacostia breaking news. The Post gave Diamond's murder just two sentences in its Oct. 11 Crime & Justice roundup.

But one camera crew rushed to the scene to interview the young man's family and friends, film his room and probe the details of his death. Its members were Diamond's friends and co-workers from the Earth Conservation Corps; they are working on a reality TV series called "Endangered Species" about the struggle for survival -- nature's and their own -- in Anacostia.

The Earth Conservation Corps was formed to put the

youth of Anacostia to work restoring the Anacostia River. When I volunteered to oversee the fledgling national service program in 1992, I did not realize that I also was signing up to be a pallbearer.

Diamond Teague was about to go to college using the AmeriCorps scholarship he had been awarded in May for successfully completing his seven months of service in the Earth Conservation Corps program. He was a blossoming community leader who felt close to God and preached his first sermons this year. Diamond was especially proud of having been a member of the corps.

Monique Johnson, Bennie Jones, Gerald Hewlett, Durell Roberts, Leroy Brown, Keisha Winfield, Daniel Williams and Wayne Fox were proud to be members of the corps too. But like Diamond, they were murdered -- stabbed, beaten or shot to death in a breathtaking disregard for life. Young people in Anacostia have poorer odds for survival than do the bald eagles they restored to the nation's capital.

For 11 years the members of the Earth Conservation Corps have fought for their local environment. They have planned and built the first sections of the Anacostia Riverwalk; taught environmental stewardship to school kids; turned riverside dumps into parks; and

are working to restore the bald eagle and barn owl to their rightful home along the Anacostia River.

In interviews conducted for the "Endangered Species" series, corps members say that they believe that by restoring the ravaged river, they are improving human lives, that they joined the corps to make a contribution to their community and country and that they too want to believe in the promise of America.

But Diamond's death has hit hard, and despite a \$25,000 reward offered by police, it is likely that the motive for this crime -- and the murderer -- may never be known. The rest of Washington may have become accustomed to the senseless slaughter his murder represents, but the Earth Conservation Corps has not.

Each of its members will carry Diamond's coffin for a long time. And we need help in shouldering this weight.

Restoring full funding for AmeriCorps would be a small first step.

In his narration for the pilot episode of "Endangered Species," corps member Twan Woods says, "In 1946, unable to feed their young from the polluted Anacostia, the capital's last pair of bald eagles deserted their Kingman Island nest.

"Remember the coal miners who brought canaries into the mines to warn them of danger?"

"Well, I think those bald eagles were our canaries."

But in his heart, Twan Woods knows that the canary is even closer to home. By producing "Endangered Species," he and the other corps members are saying to anyone who will listen, "We are your canaries. If we die you are all in danger."

Oct. 9 didn't surprise any of the corps members. The violence rages around them every day. LaShauntae Moore and Darius Phillips, corps camera operators, filmed the aftermath with a vengeance.

They did not flinch as Diamond's best friend, Jerome Scott, was told the news of his death.

At the Teague home, where many had gathered, they asked Diamond's parents if they would consent to be interviewed standing on the porch where their son had just been murdered. Turning to Jerome, Mrs. Teague asked, "What are the cameras for?"

He started to cry. "Diamond was a hero," he told her. "We want everyone to know who he was and all the good things he did."

Then came a young voice from the grieving huddle,

"There is not enough videotape."

-- Robert H. Nixon

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