

**Historic Context Statement:  
The Black Power Movement in Washington, D.C., 1966–1978**



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for DC Preservation League, 2023

D.C. Black Panther Party's community center at 1932 17th Street NW.  
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## **Introduction**

When U.S. sprinters John Carlos and Tommie Smith raised their fists in the Black Power salute on the medal stand during the 1968 Olympics in Mexico City, they were vilified by many white Americans. Some in the mainstream media branded them traitors, they received an avalanche of death threats from outraged white citizens, and the U.S. Olympic team ousted them from Mexico City, sending them scrambling to find flights back to California. Feeling besieged, the two

remained mute, refusing to make any statements to the press for eight days. They would not break their silence until they traveled across the country to Washington, D.C.<sup>1</sup>

Their host in the nation's capital, Black Power organizer Stokely Carmichael, told reporters why Carlos and Smith had chosen the District to make their first statement to the media: "This city, because of its black majority, should give them a hero's welcome."



Olympic sprinter John Carlos disembarking at National Airport to Black Power salutes, 1968. Reprinted with permission of the DC Public Library, Star Collection © Washington Post.

Indeed it did. Carlos came to the District alone on October 24—Smith remained in California caring for his mother who “nearly had a nervous breakdown because of harassment by the press.” When he landed at National Airport, 200 people led by Black Power firebrand H. Rap Brown, SNCC organizer Koko Barnes, and Carmichael were on hand to greet him. The crowds only increased as the day went on. From the airport, Carlos headed to Federal City College, where almost 600 people gathered for an 11am press conference. Later in the day, 2,000 gathered outside of Frederick Douglass Hall at Howard University where the Student Assembly presented

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<sup>1</sup> See Douglas Hartmann, *Race, Culture, and the Revolt of the Black Athlete: The 1968 Olympic Protests and Their Aftermath* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003). Amy Bass, *Not the Triumph but the Struggle: The 1968 Olympics and the Making of the Black Athlete* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004).

Carlos with a gold medallion emblazoned with an image of Malcolm X. Later that afternoon, Carlos and his entourage retired to the New School of Afro American Thought on 14th Street, arguably the city's most important hub for Black Power organizing.

Carlos had not simply benefitted from the city's large black majority—approximately half a million people, 70% of the population, in 1968—but its large and well organized community of Black Power activists. Every stop in his tour was orchestrated by local organizers and each of the venues was black run. This huge black majority and dense Black Power activist community made the District a critical epicenter of Black Power organizing on par with the better known communities in New York, Los Angeles, Newark and Chicago.

## **Terminology**

This context study provides a brief history of the Black Power movement in Washington, D.C. It identifies important themes in the movement, names critical players, and establishes a list of places that define this history.

Black Power was and is a slippery term that contemporaries used to refer to a wide array of activists – ranging from black capitalists to Pan-African socialists. Despite their differences, what united these activists was an embrace of three core tenets: black self-determination, self-love, and self-defense or, as the historian Rhonda Williams describes it, “a politics in which black people placed less faith in white goodwill and paid more attention to the structure of power.”<sup>2</sup>

## **Period of Significance and Study Limitations**

Though Black Power politics has appeared and reappeared in African American life for well over a century, this study will focus on the moment between 1966 and 1978 when it overtook civil rights style politics and became the dominant impulse among African Americans. Aside from these temporal limitations, this study will explore the Black Power movement in the District of Columbia only. While we treat the District as a national hub of Black Power organizing, giving appropriate attention to famous out of town activists like John Carlos, our focus is the community of organizers who made up the local movement and their impact on the city.

The District of Columbia is unique among American cities. Created by Article 1, Section 8 of the Constitution, which reserved the ultimate power of legislative jurisdiction over the federal city to Congress, it is the voteless capital of a democracy. The federal government's ultimate control over the city has often made it a laboratory for legislators interested in trying out new policies and a battleground for national interests seeking to implement their vision of American democracy on the symbolically important capital. This is particularly true when it comes to matters of race. The District has always had a large black community. African Americans constituted roughly 20% of the population when Congress arrived in town in 1800, and their numbers have only once dipped below that percentage in the intervening 222 years. Indeed, in 1957, rapid black in-migration and white out-migration made the District the country's first majority black major American city, and the black percentage of the population

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<sup>2</sup> Rhonda Williams, *Concrete Demands: The Search for Black Power in the 20th Century* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 4.

would continue to rise until it reached a high of 73% in the early 1970s. It was in this moment, when residents affectionately referred to the District as “Chocolate City,” that Black Power activists spearheaded the effort to secure self-determination for the city.

## **Methodology**

The Washington D.C. Black Power Context Study was carried out in two phases. Phase I occurred between 2016 and 2021, and included the creation of a census / timeline of all of the major Black Power organizations and events that operated or took place in the District between 1961 and 1978. A team of researchers led by George Derek Musgrove created the census by checking the secondary source literature to identify Black Power events and organizations that occurred / operated in the District of Columbia. They also conducted informational interviews with veteran D.C. Black Power activists to identify D.C. Black Power events and organizations that may not have previously come to the attention of scholars. Third, the team of researchers searched D.C. newspapers , specifically the *Washington Post*, *Evening Star*, and *Washington Afro* to identify additional events and organizations, and write short descriptions of each. In those instances where the above sources were not sufficient to write a short description of a given event or organization, the team consulted the archival record.

Phase II involved 1. the identification of major themes to organize the development and understanding of the context study, and 2. public scoping engagement with a subject matter expert (SME) panel to develop the themes and topics that shaped Black Power history in DC. Thank you to subject matter experts Donelle Boose, Judy Richardson, Charles Stephenson and Anne Valk for their insightful comments.

## **Themes**

Nine primary themes were identified in relation to sites associated with the Black Power Movement in Washington, D.C. in 1966–1978. However approximately 30 of these, more than any other single thematic category, are not primarily associated with any of the major themes.

For each site designated as Other, the survey in Appendix A provides an explanatory note. Examples include:

- Nation of Islam, Mosque #4 and other sites related to Black nationalist religious institutions.
- The headquarters of Associated Community Teams (ACT), Black United Front, and other organizations that addressed multiple issues spanning a wide range of themes.
- The co-located offices of the Washington Informer and the United Black Fund, related to Black institution-building but not associated with any primary themes.

- A Brookland house on 10th Street NE that was the site of a protest by the Emergency Committee on the Transportation Crisis (ECTC), which protested Black housing and neighborhoods being demolished for freeway construction.
- Nash United Methodist Church, the site of organizing against Black economic exploitation.
- Malcolm X Park, a primary location for Black Power demonstrations and cultural events associated with multiple threads of the movement, including self-defense and Pan-Africanism.

### **Acknowledgements**

Data for the list of Black Power events and organizations below was compiled by George Derek Musgrove, Kevin Muhitch, Donelle Boose, Luwam Gebreyesus, Ralph Cyrus, Martez Gaines, Jonah Jassie, Dalia Kijakazi, and members of the SNCC Legacy Project's Black Power Chronicles. Funding for this portion of the project was generously provided by the UMBC College of Arts Humanities and Social Sciences, the Department of History and the Imaging Research Center.

# Historical Context of the Black Power Movement in the District of Columbia

## Origins

The Washington D.C. Black Power Movement grew out of the wrenching transformations that engulfed the nation's capital in the two decades after World War II. With stunning rapidity, between 1945 and 1965, the city was transformed from being majority white and legally segregated to majority black and de facto segregated. To carry on the struggle for black equality in this new environment, African Americans gravitated toward what many would call Black Power politics.

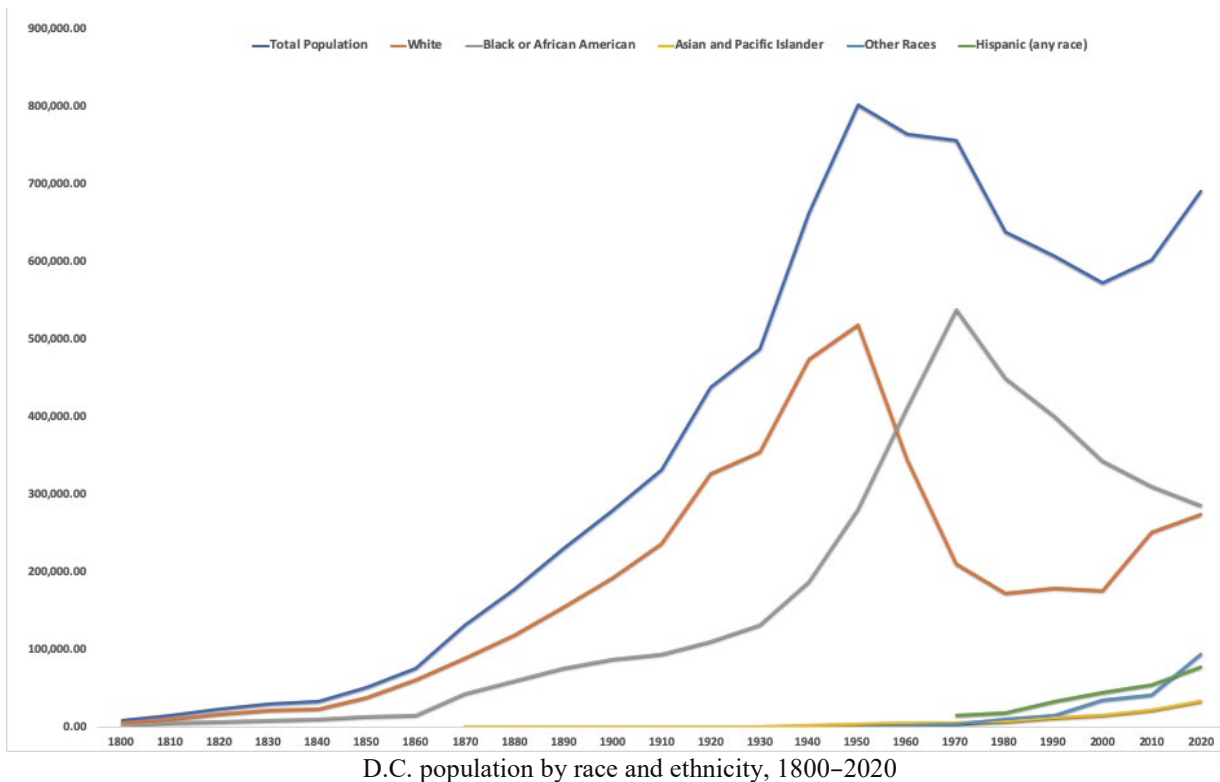
As of the mid-1940s, the District was run by three presidentially appointed commissioners overseen by Congress. These federal officials worked closely with a powerful group of local businessmen to run the city. All of these political elites were white and the overwhelming majority of them were determined to maintain segregation. During the first half of the 20th century, these officials beat back local African Americans and white liberals' efforts to end segregation in the District. Following WWII, however, this group lost the tacit support of key federal powerbrokers. In order to strengthen the United States position in the Cold War, powerful members of the executive and judicial branches began to work with African American and liberal white reformers to end segregation in the nation's capital. With no state or local government to protect white supremacy, this coalition swept away the legal framework of segregation in the District within ten years—a full decade before they were able to do so in other parts of the South.

In 1946, President Truman issued the opening salvo. At the urging of civil rights organizations who met with him following the bloody 1946 election, he appointed a President's Committee on Civil Rights. The following year, the body issued its report, *To Secure These Rights*, which singled out segregation in the District as a “graphic illustration of the failure of [U.S.] democracy.” Leveraging his committee's findings, Truman issued a series of reforms, including Executive Order 9980 which banned segregation in the federal government workforce—the city's largest employer. The president's actions emboldened civil rights activists in the city. They broadened their campaign for equal access to public facilities to nearly every aspect of Washington life, from playgrounds, to buying a home, to hospitals. And the Supreme Court, often wielding *amicus curiae* briefs from the executive, proved sympathetic to their arguments. In a series of landmark cases, it ruled that restrictive covenants, one of the principal ways white D.C. residents had enforced neighborhood segregation, were legally unenforceable (*Hurd v. Hodge*, 1948); that a 19th century law banning racial discrimination in District businesses, which had never officially been repealed, was legally enforceable (*District of Columbia V. John R. Thompson Co.*, 1953); and that segregation in public education was unconstitutional (*Bolling v. Sharpe*, 1954). Thus, within just one decade, the historians Chris Myers Asch and George Derek Musgrove write, the legal pillars of District segregation “had crumbled under the pressure of ceaseless community agitation, powerful interracial alliances, key Supreme Court decisions, and strategic support from federal authorities.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Chris Myers Asch and George Derek Musgrove, *Chocolate City, A History of Race and Democracy in the Nation's Capital* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2017), 285-319, quoted from 286.

The end of legal segregation helped to spur massive demographic shifts in the District. Following World War II, the District grew from a mid-sized southern city into a sprawling metropolitan area and international hub of the United States Cold War state. This economic and spatial expansion attracted Americans of all races. Pulled by the city's growing service sector and pushed by the collapse of plantation agriculture, African Americans flooded out of rural Virginia and North Carolina and into the District. Between 1940 and 1960, the city's black population more than doubled, jumping from 187,000 to 411,000. Unable to access the segregated suburbs, these African Americans packed into the already overcrowded black communities of the old L'Enfant city, south of Florida Avenue. The crush of people and the active underdevelopment of these neighborhoods by slum landlords and redlining banks led to dramatic deterioration of the housing stock. As a result, the black middle class headed north and eastward, seeking better housing in the previously segregated neighborhoods outside the burgeoning ghetto. Their incursion into these all-white neighborhoods precipitated waves of panic selling among residents. In the 1940s, when segregation was still relatively secure, the city's white population actually increased by 40,000 (though a *majority* of the metropolitan area's new white residents went directly to the burgeoning suburbs). But as the barriers of segregation fell inside the city, white D.C. residents flooded out to the suburbs, with more than 170,000 leaving the District between 1950 and 1960. (Another 130,000 would leave the city in the 1960s.) By 1957, this racial churn had turned the District into the country's first major city with a black majority.<sup>4</sup>



<sup>4</sup> Campbell Gibson and Kay Jung, *Historical Census Statistics on Population Totals by Race, 1790 to 1990, and by Hispanic Origin, 1970 to 1990, for the United States, Regions, Divisions, and States* (Washington, D.C., U.S. Census Bureau, 2002), Table 23, at <https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/working-papers/2002/demo/POP-twps0056.pdf>.



Though civil rights activists and liberal reformers had eliminated legal segregation in the nation's capital and demographic change had created a black majority, the city remained starkly (de facto) segregated and unequal. As late as 1961, black median wages were barely half those of white workers, and black people had almost no presence in the upper reaches of the federal government, District government, and local white-owned businesses. White-owned banks refused to lend to black buyers. White real estate agents steered buyers to neighborhoods based on race. Determined both to draw middle class whites back into the city and to ease their commute from the suburbs, federal planners instituted massive urban renewal and highway construction projects that displaced tens of thousands of poor residents, the vast majority of them black. The 80% white police force regularly used racial epithets and brute force when dealing with black citizens. Segregationists in Congress marshaled their appropriating authority to underfund city agencies that served black Washingtonians and their oversight authority to blame the city's problems on the black majority. Though legally desegregated, the city was a critical front in the looming post-civil rights era battle over the shape and meaning of racial equality.<sup>5</sup>

Amidst these transformations, advocates of black nationalism, always present in the District's black community, grew in influence. Nation of Islam (NOI) leader Elijah Muhammad, who had personally established the city's Muslim community in 1937, began a major recruitment drive in 1961, rallying 10,000 at Uline Arena and dedicating a newly built Mosque #4 on New Jersey Avenue in Shaw. NOI national spokesman Malcolm X also visited the city that year, on one trip debating the civil rights activist Bayard Rustin at Howard University. For many young activists, the Muslim minister's message was captivating. A leading member of Project Awareness, the student group that had staged the debate, the young organizer Stokely Carmichael, recalled that "Malcolm demonstrated... the raw power, the visceral potency, of the grip of [sic] our unarticulated collective blackness held over us." Malcolm would return to the city briefly to helm Mosque #4 in 1963, and deepened his relationship with the student activists at Howard University. His ideas would have a formative impact on them, and many would become the leaders of the D.C. Black Power Movement in the years ahead.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> See Haynes Johnson, *Dusk at the Mountain: The Negro, the Nation, and the Capital* (New York: Doubleday, 1963). Asch and Musgrove, *Chocolate City*, 320-354.

<sup>6</sup> "Drug Patrols Improve Image of Muslims," *Washington Post*, Sep 18, 1988. "A Breach In Guards' Invincibility," *Washington Post*, Sep 2, 1996. Johnson, *Dusk at the Mountain* (1963), 136-45. Blair Ruble, *U Street: A Biography* (Baltimore: JHU Press, 2010), 66-67 and 240. <https://thenationsmosque.org/about/noidc.org>. "Muslim's Muhammad Unable to Appear at D.C. Rally," *Jet*, Jul 13, 1961. Manning Marable and Garrett Felber, *The Portable Malcolm X Reader* (New York: Penguin Classics, 2013), xxxii. Carmichael quoted from Manning Marable, *Malcolm X* (New York: Penguin Books, 2011), 482.



Bayard Rustin (seated left) and Malcolm X (standing) at their 1961 Howard University debate. Seated to the right is Michael Winston, the debate moderator. Courtesy of the Moorland-Spangarn Research Center, Howard University Archives.

Another African American organizer gaining influence among the city's black community was Julius Hobson. A federal civil servant and head of the D.C. chapter of the Congress of Racial Equality, Hobson had used disruptive direct action campaigns to force nominally desegregated local institutions to hire African Americans before being ejected from the group for his authoritarian leadership style. In 1964, he worked with Malcolm X and the Cambridge, Maryland leader Gloria Richardson, New York tenants' rights activist Jesse Gray and others to form Associated Community Teams (ACT), a confederation of militant protest organizations determined to seize political and economic power in their respective cities. The new group would "isolate Uncle Tom... reject white liberals...[and promote] Black Unity," according to one planning document. Easily the most ubiquitous protest leader of mid-1960s D.C., Hobson's angry insistence on full equality *now* and his disruptive protest techniques became a model for many of the city's young activists.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> "New Negro Group Moves Against Poverty Project," *Washington Post*, Jul 6, 1965. "Black Power Group Goal High Politics," *Washington Post*, July 9, 1965. "School Board Parley Upset: 3 Protest 'Uncle Toms' on Board," *Washington Post*, July 20, 1965. "'Police Brutality' Cries Remain Despite Corrective Steps: Recruits," *Washington*



Julius Hobson standing next to the station wagon he often used in his protests, here outfitted as a sound truck, August 1967. Reprinted with permission of the DC Public Library, Star Collection © Washington Post.

Ironically, the federal government helped to spread Hobson's style of politics. In 1965, the Johnson Administration launched its War on Poverty, an ambitious program to enlist the poor themselves in addressing the scourge of poverty in America. Using an existing social services program, the United Planning Organization, and sometimes issuing direct grants from agencies like the Department of Labor, the Administration funneled millions of dollars into the District to hire welfare mothers, street "dudes," and former felons to oversee a host of organizations designed to address the problems of the ghetto. These organizers used this money to demand police accountability, organize welfare recipients, and call for a popularly elected city government, among a host of other issues. In the years ahead, they would become some of the most militant activists in the city.<sup>8</sup>

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*Post*, Sep 14, 1965. Burt Solomon, *The Washington Century: Three Families and the Shaping of the Nation's Capital* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2004), 154-55, 63-165.

<sup>8</sup> Tom Sherwood and Harry Jaffe, *Dream City: Race, Power and the Decline of Washington, D.C.* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994), 42, 57, and 59. Asch and Musgrove, *Chocolate City*, 347-348.



United Planning Organization Neighborhood Development Center, date unknown. Reprinted with permission of the DC Public Library, Star Collection © Washington Post.

### **The Black Power Movement Begins in D.C.**

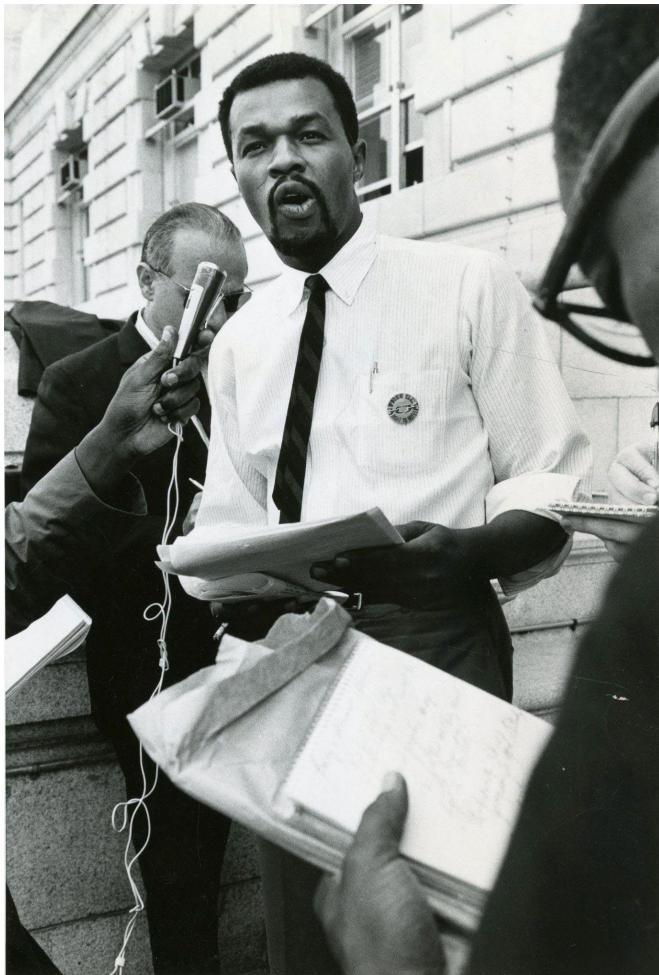
The national Black Power Movement emerged after Stokely Carmichael's famed August 16, 1966, call during the Meredith March Against Fear in Greenwood, Mississippi: "We want Black Power!"<sup>9</sup> The D.C. Black Power Movement had no such dramatic inception. Rather, across much of 1966, both before and after Carmichael's speech, local organizers created a network of new organizations geared toward gaining power, celebrating black culture, and defending black life. Building on the ideas and infrastructure created by Malcolm X, Julius Hobson and the War on Poverty, they shifted the focus of black activism away from seeking equality of opportunity, which would disproportionately benefit the black middle class, and toward gaining resources and control for the poor.

As in the rest of the country, the Black Power movement in D.C. grew out of the civil rights movement. Marion Barry, head of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee's (SNCC) D.C. chapter, created the Free D.C. movement in February 1966 to reinvigorate the campaign for home rule. Barry hoped to "...free D.C. from our enemies—the people who make it impossible for us to do anything about lousy schools, brutal cops, slumlords... and a host of

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<sup>9</sup> Hasan Jeffries, *Bloody Lowndes: Civil Rights and Black Power in Alabama's Black Belt* (New York: NYU Press, 2010), 185.

other ills that run rampant through our city.” That April, D.C. Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) leader Walter Fauntroy founded the Model Inner City Community Organization (MICCO) to seize control of the urban renewal process in Shaw. Determined to avoid the mass displacement of African Americans and poor whites that had occurred in Southwest— what Fauntroy called “Negro removal”— the SCLC leader worked to ensure that this time around urban renewal would be “of by and for the people.” And in May 1966, Rep. Adam Clayton Powell (D-Harlem), once known as “Mr. Civil Rights,” called for “Black power, what I call audacious power,” at the Howard University commencement. Stokely Carmichael, then national chairman of SNCC, found the language so compelling that he called Powell’s office to ask for a copy of the address.<sup>10</sup>



Marion Barry delivers a statement on the Free D.C. campaign on the steps of the District Building, 1966. Reprinted with permission of the DC Public Library, Star Collection © Washington Post.

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<sup>10</sup> Barry quoted from Catherine Maddison, "In Chains 400 Years... And Still in Chains in DC!" The 1966 Free DC Movement and the Challenges of Organizing in the City," *Journal of American Studies*, Vol. 41, No. 1 (Apr 2007), pp. 169-192. Fauntroy quoted from "Pastor Pushes 'Nonviolent Land Reform' for Shaw," *Washington Post*, Jun 24, 1970. Powell quoted from "Adam Clayton Powell's Call to Negro Youth: 'Seek Black Power,'" *Negro Digest* (Aug 1966). "Power Outages: The old-new politics of black protest," *The Baffler* (Dec 2016).

By the summer of 1966 the Black Power movement was in full swing in the District of Columbia and, over the course of the next twelve years, it would grow to become one of the largest and most important in the nation.

### **A Note on Movement Geography**

D.C. Black Power activists typically conducted actions and opened headquarters along the commercial corridors of large, poor black communities. In the 1960s and 1970s, the largest and poorest black community in the city was Shaw, a 675-acre area containing 45,000 people just above downtown. The main commercial corridors in this neighborhood were 14th Street above Thomas Circle and U Street between 7th and 18th streets. The area around the busy intersection of 14th and U hosted perhaps the densest concentration of Black Power events and organizations during the period covered in this study. Just north of U, where 7th Street becomes Georgia Avenue, the students of Howard University kept up a steady stream of Black Power events and actions all the way into the 1990s. The last major node of Black Power organizing in the city was along Nichols Avenue SE between Good Hope Road and the Barry Farm Dwellings housing project. Massive public housing construction and white flight following WWII transformed the Anacostia neighborhood surrounding Nichols Avenue from more than 80% white in 1950 to 85% black in 1970. War on Poverty organizers working out of Southeast Neighborhood House succeeded in mobilizing this population in the mid 1960s. Though by no means limited to these three areas, Black Power activism clustered around these commercial corridors, creating a recognizable movement geography.

### **Theme 1: The War on Poverty Organizing**

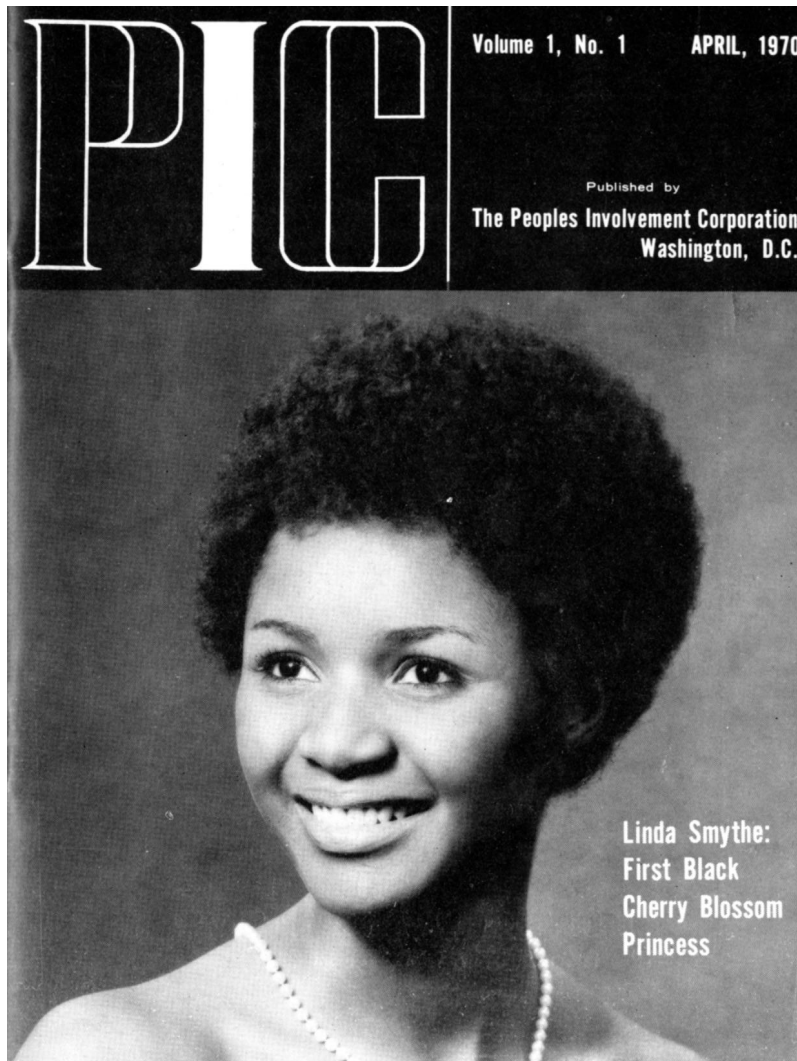
In 1966 Black Power organizations and protests proliferated in the nation's capital, with many funded by federal dollars. Desperate to tamp down the growing tension between black citizens and white police, shop owners, and landlords, the federal government poured War on Poverty money into D.C. The United Planning Organization alone disbursed funds to community groups that created the Poverty Rights Action Center, Cardozo Area Arts Committee, Rebels with a Cause, Barry Farm Band of Angels, Citywide Welfare Alliance, and Neighborhood Development Youth Program, all before the end of 1966. Within three years, Black Power activists had built a dense citywide organizational infrastructure with federal dollars that included a pioneering arts collective, a student-run "freedom school" in Northeast, and a pilot program for the community control of the police in Shaw/Columbia Heights. At its height, the UPO and its affiliates employed more than 1,500 low-income residents. Direct grants from the Department of Labor and other federal agencies employed hundreds more.



Dance Instructor Steve Taylor works with his class at Southeast Neighborhood House, Nov. 11, 1970. Reprinted with permission of the DC Public Library, Star Collection © Washington Post.

A representative example of the way War on Poverty money transformed black neighborhood organizing in the city is the case of Southeast Neighborhood House. Founded in 1929 by pioneering black physician, Dorothy Boulding Ferebee, in its first thirty years of operation Southeast Neighborhood House offered a variety of social services, from recreation programs for children to health clinics for senior citizens. With an infusion of \$133,000 from UPO in 1965, however, Southeast House became a locus of radical protest activity, as residents became paid community organizers who hosted meetings, held rallies, and confronted city officials about rat infestations, overcrowded schools, and inadequate recreational facilities. Organizers from Southeast House helped residents of what was then called Far Southeast create the Barry Farm Band of Angels, a group of public housing residents who sought a larger role for tenants in a planned remodeling of the complex in February 1966. That same month, they helped Anacostia and Congress Heights youth create Rebels with a Cause, which used direct action protest to get city and federal officials to consult area youth when crafting plans to address juvenile delinquency. These neighborhood-based activist groups soon stimulated the creation of citywide organizations. Members of Rebels with a Cause would go on to create the Neighborhood Development Youth Program (NDYP), a citywide youth anti-poverty program formed in the summer of 1966 with funding from the Department of Labor. That same summer, many of the women from the Band of Angels helped to found the Citywide Welfare Alliance, a coalition of welfare recipients who demanded better treatment from the city government. Despite its many organizing successes, Southeast House struggled with staffing issues and minor fraud,

and almost closed in the late 1970s. However, it remained open for the next twenty-two years, returning in this period to its previous role as a community services provider, before accumulated financial issues forced it to file for bankruptcy.<sup>11</sup>



The People's Involvement Corp. magazine, April 1970. Reprinted with permission of the D.C. Public Library.

The War on Poverty also had a pronounced effect on organizers across the river in Shaw, the city's largest contiguous black community. There, the federal Office of Economic Opportunity's focus on creating representative organizations that could provide some semblance of popular input as the area prepared for a planned urban renewal program resulted in the creation of a series of neighborhood-based anti-poverty and social service organizations that acted like neighborhood governments. One such organization was the People's Involvement Corporation (PIC), created in 1967. PIC set out to give residents of the area stretching all the

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<sup>11</sup> "SE Neighborhood House to Stay Open," *Washington Post*, Mar 29, 1979. "Poverty War Workers Text," *Evening Star*, Mar 28, 1965. "Anacostia's Good Neighbor Is in Trouble; Residents Fret Over 63-Year-Old Friend," *Washington Post*, Apr 23, 1992. Asch and Musgrove, *Chocolate City*, 348 and 353.



way from North Capitol Street west to 16th Street, and from Harvard Street in Columbia Heights south to Massachusetts Avenue, an active voice in the corporation's efforts at social and economic development. As one of its first actions, the corporation held an open election on June 15, 1968 to select its 25 member board. (PIC leaders allowed residents as young as 13 to vote, so that youth could get "an early start in citizen participation.") Initially, PIC ran a childcare facility and connected residents with social services and job training. In early 1968, the Johnson administration had granted PIC the contract to administer a multi-million dollar community center planned for the area. After the center was built, PIC expanded its reach by using grants from federal agencies to seed community-owned businesses such as a printing shop, a construction company, and even helping to fund the black-owned Harambee Hotel planned for Georgia Avenue just off of the Howard University campus. These later efforts were rooted in what PIC Deputy Director Ora Shady dubbed "community capitalism," a strategy that organization leaders hoped would enrich the entire community. PIC allowed neighborhood residents to purchase stock in its business endeavors and required subcontractors to hire neighborhood residents, all for the purpose of keeping wealth in the neighborhood. While sharp declines in anti-poverty funding forced the corporation to abandon some of its more ambitious projects in the 1970s, it continued to serve the residents of Shaw and Upper Cardozo. As late as 1998, PIC partnered with African American owned taxi companies to train 100 new taxi drivers and tour guides.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> "Center to Aid Poor Planned in District," *Washington Post*, Jan 9, 1968. "UPO Transfers Service Program," *Washington Post*, Mar 21, 1968. "Ghetto Building Firm Formed," *Washington Post*, Oct 6, 1968. "Inner-City Print Firm Gets \$700,000 Grant," *Washington Post*, July 18, 1969. "Citizen Group Asks Riot Area Renewal Role," *Washington Post*, Mar 9, 1969. "Nixon Supports Black Capitalism," *Atlanta Daily World*, Feb 4, 1972. "PIC Accuses City Of Breaking Word," *Washington Post*, September 13, 1974. "'A Hindrance': OEO Ends 4-Year Support of D.C. Economic Project," *Washington Post*, March 5, 1973. "D.C. Altering Its Poverty Programs," *Washington Post*, Feb 8, 1973. "New Training Institute for D.C. Taxi Drivers Announced May 14," *U.S. Newswire*, May 12, 1998.



MICCO founder Rev. Walter Fauntroy reviews redevelopment plans with architect Herbert McDonald and Cedric Carter for the 1700 block of 7th St NW, destroyed during the 1968 uprising. Reprinted with permission of the DC Public Library, Star Collection © Washington Post.

Of all the D.C. programs funded by the War on Poverty, the one with the most impact on the built environment was the Model Inner City Community Organization (MICCO), founded in 1966 by Rev. Walter Fauntroy and a coalition of Shaw ministers. Fauntroy had been instrumental in labeling Southwest urban renewal “Negro removal,” and he was determined that Shaw residents not meet a similar fate now that his own neighborhood was being targeted for redevelopment. Working with the Johnson Administration, which provided MICCO with a \$2.8 million planning grant, Fauntroy helped to make Shaw into a testing ground for “citizen participation” in the urban renewal program. Initially, when the federal government identified Shaw as an urban renewal site, the community broke up into a number of warring groups, with organizations like the UPO-funded Community Urban Renewal Action Council and Shaw People for Urban Renewal criticizing MICCO as being run in the interests of government elites and the black middle class. Fauntroy was able to distinguish MICCO from this crowded field by enlisting the support of Martin Luther King, Jr., who led a 1967 march through Shaw, and by assembling a talented and well-resourced planning team that allowed him to set the terms of debate. By 1969, MICCO had absorbed most of its competitors, becoming a sprawling umbrella organization encompassing nearly all of the area's PTAs, churches, unions, and UPO-funded neighborhood councils. That same year, the Nixon Administration, seeking to fulfill its campaign pledge to support “black capitalism,” gave MICCO a \$30 million grant and the organization set to work building and refurbishing hundreds of houses and apartments, typically with its member

organizations acting as nonprofit sponsors. Yet almost immediately, as the Nixon Administration sought to disassemble the War on Poverty, MICCO began losing power. In 1970, the Redevelopment Land Agency (RLA), which had previously allowed MICCO to control the planning process, reasserted itself and rejected the group's developers on several projects. As early as 1971, it became clear that the Administration intended for MICCO to be a community liaison for the RLA, not control the process. In 1973, the RLA accused MICCO staff of sloppy bookkeeping and misappropriation of funds, and charged that it no longer represented Shaw residents. It then voted to eliminate the group's contract, thereby ending the city's experiment with community control of urban renewal.<sup>13</sup>

War on Poverty money was so ubiquitous in the District that it became an issue of contention among Black Power organizers, with some arguing that it undermined the goal of self-determination. By the late 1960s activists were drawing a clear distinction between those groups that accepted federal funds and those that were supported by "the community." The Pittsburgh native and poet Gaston Neal initially accepted federal money for his Cardozo Area Arts Committee. The group hosted "Three Days of Soul," a music and cultural festival held on the grounds of Cardozo High School in March 1966. Yet within a year, Neal was eschewing federal money for his New School of Afro-American Thought. He hoped to free black minds so that they could direct black hands to start a revolution. One could not do that, he surmised, on the federal dime. One can see a similar divide in other areas of Black Power organizing. While MICCO accepted federal funds for its urban renewal efforts, the Black Land Movement, which intended to replace all private, for-profit businesses in Shaw with cooperatives, did not. Former SNCC activists James (Jimmy) Garrett, Charlie Cobb, and Courtland Cox tried to create a black studies program within the War on Poverty-funded Federal City College. Yet when they met resistance from school administrators backed by conservatives in Congress, they decided, in Garrett's words, to leave the "plantation" and create the independent Center for Black Education in two Columbia Heights row houses.

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<sup>13</sup> "Pastor Pushes 'Nonviolent Land Reform' for Shaw," *Washington Post*, Jun 24, 1970. "MICCO Cutoff Ends Citizen Control of Urban Renewal," *Washington Post*, Jan 22, 1973.



Stokely Carmichael addresses an October 1968 gathering outside of the New School for African American Thought following the police shooting of Elijah Bennett. Reprinted with permission of the DC Public Library, Star Collection © Washington Post.

Though they disagreed over the role of federal money in Black Power organizing, many activists privileged their personal relationships, and the principle of unity, over ideological disputes. Pulled toward revolutionary politics following a trip to Cuba, Stokely Carmichael needed his old friend Marion Barry for taking federal money to initiate the summer youth jobs program Pride, Inc., playfully asking, “What’s this Pride mess I hear you been jiving with?”<sup>14</sup> The two nonetheless remained collaborators and friends.

## **Theme 2: Black Women’s Activism and Gender Analysis**

Washington, D.C. has been an important center for black women’s activism since at least the late 19th century. Nationally prominent Black women organizers like Mary Church Terrell, Nannie Helen Bouroughs, and Pauli Murray called the city home and carried out much of their work in D.C. Many black women city residents carried on this tradition during the Black Power era. They tended to involve themselves in Black Power activism through two distinct, class-determined

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<sup>14</sup> Sherwood and Jaffe, *Dream City*, 66.

routes and drew on their gendered positionality within the movement to expand and complicate the meaning of Black liberation.



Citywide Welfare Alliance march, c. 1966. Reprinted with permission of the DC Public Library, Star Collection © Washington Post.

First, large numbers of poor and working class women entered Black Power activism through War on Poverty-funded organizations and programs. Previously left out of or marginalized within middle class- or male-dominated organizations, they founded and often served as the most outspoken members of the many anti-poverty and welfare rights organizations created in the mid-to-late-1960s. As covered in Theme I above, groups like the Barry Farm Band of Angels and Washington (later changed to Citywide) Welfare Alliance were dominated by Etta Horn and many of the women who lived with her in the Barry Farm housing project. Though Horn is a uniquely assertive figure—aside from her local activism she helped to found and served as an officer of the National Welfare Rights Organization—many of the other anti-poverty and welfare rights organizations included similarly dynamic poor and working class

black female members and leaders.<sup>15</sup> For example, the Metropolitan Community Aid Council was run out of a Quonset hut in Marshall Heights by Willie J. Hardy, who had grown up in this poor, isolated, and largely undeveloped Northeast neighborhood in the 1930s. Hardy's leadership within her community led her to direct the University Neighborhood Council in Shaw/Cardozo, which operated both separately from and as contractor with the War on Poverty-funded United Planning Organization; to help organize, with SNCC's Marion Barry, a one-day bus boycott in 1966; and in 1968, to become the sole woman steering committee member of the newly established Black United Front.<sup>16</sup> Both Horn and Hardy provide examples of movement activists whose identity as mothers informed their politics, specifically their focus on economic and housing justice.<sup>17</sup>

Middle class black women often entered Black Power activism through black male-dominated organizations. Black women were prominent members of Pride (Mary Treadwell), the D.C. chapter of the Black Panther Party (Nkenge Toure), Drum and Spear Bookstore and Press (Judy Richardson and Jennifer Lawson), African Liberation Support Committee (Florence Tate), and a wide variety of other organizations. Though capable and experienced activists, they often encountered sexism in these organizations. Nkenge Toure recalled of the D.C. Chapter of the BPP, for instance, that the cadre adhered to a gendered division of labor, with women "doing the cooking, extending sexual favors, and feeling taken advantage of."<sup>18</sup> Many male Black Power activists, working from the mistaken idea that a racist system had emasculated black men and elevated black women, adopted the notion that a key goal of the black freedom struggle should be to raise black men to their rightful place as head of the family. They derived this notion from sources as diverse as the Daniel Patrick Moynihan's infamous report "The Negro Family: the Case for National Action" and Los Angeles Black Power organizer Ron Karenga's teachings on proper male and female roles in 'African' societies.<sup>19</sup> These ideas were perhaps less prominent in the District *because* the city boasted so many strong black female leaders and because some of the D.C. Black Power Movement's most influential organizations, SNCC foremost among them, had developed a far more egalitarian culture than many of the groups that dominated organizing circles in other cities. Nonetheless, as the historian Anne Valk has argued, many of the city's black female organizers felt pulled between a white woman-dominated (and sometimes racist) second wave feminist movement and a black male-dominated (and often sexist) Black Power Movement.

Initially feeling this need to choose, most black women organizers in the city chose Black Power. At Howard University, for instance, several young women created WOMB, which took a decidedly hostile stance toward (white-dominated) feminist organizations, in the spring of 1970. The name WOMB was not an acronym, but a word chosen to denote "the kind of fertility and nurturing that is necessary," for the prosperity of the black community, the founders asserted. Seeing themselves not as oppositional but complementary to black men, the 400-member

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<sup>15</sup> Lauren Elizabeth Pearlman, *Democracy's Capital: Black Political Power in Washington, D.C. 1960s-1970s* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2019), 42-43. Anne Valk, *Radical Sisters: Second Wave Feminism and Black Liberation in Washington, D.C.* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 38-59.

<sup>16</sup> "Lloyd N. Hardy, District Cab Driver, Activist," *Washington Post*, Feb. 15, 1970; Michael Adams, "Mother of 6 Fights Cardozo Poverty By Cutting Red Tape," *Evening Star*, Nov 22, 1966, B1; "D.C. Negro Leaders Work to Maintain Uneasy Coalition," Jan 12, 1968.

<sup>17</sup> Valk, *Radical Sisters*, Chapter 2.

<sup>18</sup> Valk, *Radical Sisters*, 125.

<sup>19</sup> Valk, *Radical Sisters*, 110-34. Scott Brown, *Fighting for Us*, 38-73.

organization worked to educate “the black woman politically and spiritually to aid in the liberation of all people,” in the words of WOMB President Rosalyn Smith. The group’s principal organizing project, Operation Zygote, was a summer camp-style program for black children scheduled for June to August, 1970. But the group received the majority of its press for its stand against the August 26, 1970, D.C. women’s liberation strike. WOMB organizers called for Washington-area black women to boycott the event, arguing that white feminism was contradictory to black liberation.<sup>20</sup>

Rather than choose subordination to one activist faction or another, a significant number of D.C. black women activists choose to create their own Black feminist and Third World feminist organizations. An early adopter of this approach were the founders of the Black Women's Community Development Foundation (BWCDF) which served as a liaison between corporations, private foundations and grassroots, black women activists in need of small grants and technical assistance. Started in 1967 with funding from the Irwin Sweeney Miller Foundation, it was headed by black women with close contacts in the civil rights and Black Power movements. Like many black women's organizations based in D.C., the BWCDF eschewed many second-wave feminists' exclusive focus on women, though unlike WOMB it was not overtly hostile to feminism. In 1973, Executive Director Inez Smith Reid emphasized to the *Post* that "We deal in the crucial matters that affect the total black community, not only women." By 1973, the group had disbursed roughly \$500,000 in grants to African American community groups across the nation, making it one of the top five major black foundations in the country. Its signature program was the 1972 Black Women's Symposium held in Chicago, Illinois which gathered black women activists from across the nation. It also created the Black Children's Development Institute, which quickly distinguished itself as a formidable information clearinghouse for educators and social workers. In 1973, as federal and foundation funding began to dry up for community groups, the BWCDF began sponsoring its own programs, beginning with a female juvenile offender support project as well as a number of important studies on African American women's health. In 1974, at the Mayflower hotel, the BWCDF hosted a Sojourner Truth Awards ceremony that honored black women for their dedication to the African American community. Approximately 350 people attended the ceremony from around the country. Despite this impressive early track record, the Foundation struggled to raise funds without the help of large foundations. By 1978, it had stopped filing reports with the city government.<sup>21</sup>

When BWCDF was at its height in the mid-1970s, another group of D.C. black women attempted to create a space for themselves in between Black Power and Women's Liberation. In early 1974, a small group of black feminists began meeting for consciousness raising sessions at the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Library under the moniker of the D.C. chapter of the National Black Feminist Organization (NBFO). The 15-member group quickly developed a

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<sup>20</sup> “Appeal to Black Women: ‘Lib’ Strike Boycott Urged,” *Evening Star*, Aug 23, 1970. “Howard Unit Won't Join Women’s Lib,” *Washington Post*, Aug 23, 1970. Anne Valk, *Radical Sisters*, 78, and 121-122.

<sup>21</sup> "Juvenile 'Habilitation,'" *Evening Star*, Mar 29, 1973. "Priority: Liberating Black Communities" *Washington Post*, Apr 1, 1973. "Black Women Win Awards," *Washington Post*, Aug 27, 1974. "Sojourner Truth Awards," *Washington Post*, Sept 6, 1974. "Official Notices," *Evening Star*, Sep 8, 1980. Valk, *Radical Sisters*, 114. For an impressive list of BWCDF reports, see the bibliography in Akasha (Gloria T.) Hull, Patricia Bell-Scott, and Barbara Smith, *But Some of Us Are Brave*, 2nd Ed. (New York: The Feminist Press at CUNY, 2015). Inez Smith "The Black Women's Community Development Foundation Inc." Programs Booklet, Lowcountry Digital Library, at <http://lcdl.library.cofc.edu/lcdl/catalog/lcdl:90681>.

feminist praxis that incorporated a gender, race, and class analysis. As founding member Jo Benoit told the *Washington Post*, “We can't expect anyone to organize around the specific oppressions that black women experience: not white women, because they don't experience racism; not black men, because they don't encounter sexism.” The group's activity represented a new direction for black liberation and feminist organizing in Washington. Whereas earlier efforts had often separated the two agendas, the NBFO sought to fight the interlocking oppressions of racism and sexism. Although the group had few members, it was very active. Before the year was out, members played a significant role in lobbying Congress for reproductive rights and welfare reform, and joined an effort to form a feminist credit union with the Washington Area Women's Center.<sup>22</sup>

Black women also brought Black Power politics to organizations founded by white second wave feminists and members of the LGBT community. In 1975, after four years of active participation in the Black Panthers' D.C. chapter, Nkenge Toure joined the staff of the D.C. Rape Crisis Center, which had been started by white feminists affiliated with the Washington Area Women's Center in 1972. She helped lead the organization for the next 13 years, alongside her black colleagues Michelle Hudson and Loretta J. Ross, the latter of whom became the center's director in 1979. With these women at the helm, the D.C. Rape Crisis Center became the only such organization in the country run by and for women of color; the city was, at the time, three quarters black. Unsurprisingly, the RCC under Toure and Ross began to address the racialized aspects of rape and how it was policed. Black women, they argued, were both at higher risk of experiencing sexual violence and more likely to be blamed for it by the authorities. Likewise, black men were considered by the white-controlled media and the police to be the most likely perpetrators of such violence against all women, though women were more likely to be raped by men of the same race. The RCC demanded that the District government adjust its policy to account for these biases, often leading the retraining of government workers. Following the RCC's lead, activist groups like My Sister's Place, a white feminist collective that provided services for battered women, hired more black staff—among them Michelle Hudson—and changed their practices to better serve the black majority. The cross fertilization of D.C. Black Power and feminism via women such as Toure, Hudson, and Ross also influenced the rise, in the late 1970s, of black formations within the LGBT communities like the National Coalition of Black Gays (1978), the first National Third World Lesbian and Gay Conference (held at the black-owned Harambee House on Georgia Avenue in 1979), and Howard University's Lambda Student Alliance, the first openly LGBT organization at an HBCU.<sup>23</sup>

### **Theme 3: The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee**

A major force behind Black Power organizing in the city were the young men and women of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. In the years after 1965, approximately three-dozen members of SNCC migrated to the nation's capital. Seasoned veterans of the civil rights movement, they brought to the District a unity of purpose and hard earned experience largely

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<sup>22</sup> “Battling the Devils of Racism and Sexism,” *Washington Post*, Aug 23, 1974. Valk, *Radical Sisters*, 108, 131-134 and 172.

<sup>23</sup> Valk, *Radical Sisters*, 158-80. Valk email correspondence with the authors. Eric Darnell Prichard, “As Proud of Our Gayness, as We Are Our Blackness,” in Jonathan Alexander and Jacqueline Rhodes, eds., *Sexual Rhetorics: Methods, Identities, Publics* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 159-171.



unmatched by other groups of local activists. Almost immediately, they exercised a decisive influence on their adopted home, founding and playing leading roles in some of the major organizations and campaigns of the Black Power era. Their efforts, perhaps more than any other group in the city, transformed the oppressed black majority into a governing black majority.



SNCC Chairman H. Rap Brown, D.C. Chapter Chairman Lester McKinnie and Marion Barry amidst a crowd of approximately 300 outside the SNCC office at 1234 U St. NW, July 27, 1967. Reprinted with permission of the DC Public Library, Star Collection © Washington Post.

SNCC has a long and complex history in the District. Founded in April 1960, SNCC emerged from the many student activist groups that had congealed around local civil rights campaigns (typically sit-ins) in their own cities. In the District, the local student group was Howard University's Nonviolent Action Group. In the early 1960s, NAG activists staged a series of local direct action campaigns, including protesting segregation in the restaurants along Route 40 in Maryland and organizing rent strikes against slum landlords in Columbia Heights. In 1963, the national office of SNCC opened a D.C. SNCC office on the southern boundary of LeDroit Park, distinct from NAG, which focused its energies on raising money for the southern movement. Yet this office did not remain a fundraising operation for long. In 1965, SNCC tapped Marion Barry, a Mississippi native and veteran of the New York fundraising circuit, to head the D.C. office. Uninterested in fundraising, when he arrived at the SNCC office Barry immediately began laying plans to make the organization a player in local politics by harnessing the collective strength of D.C.'s black majority. In 1967, when Barry left SNCC to found Pride Inc., the SNCC national office tried unsuccessfully to return the chapter to its pre-1965 fundraising functions. Instead, direct action advocate Lester McKinnie (now Baba El

Senzengakulu Zulu) took the helm and made the SNCC office, which had relocated to the U Street corridor) a hotbed of Black Power organizing. In 1967 and 1968, SNCC focused on anti-police brutality and anti-Vietnam War activism, but many of the organizations' most experienced hands gravitated to other groups. In September 1968, a faction within the chapter attempted to violently seize the SNCC office from McKinnie. With the help of Pride and the Blackman's Volunteer Army of Liberation, a local paramilitary and drug-treatment organization, McKinnie maintained control of the building, but he closed the chapter soon after, fearing additional violence.<sup>24</sup> Though its operational life in the District was brief, SNCC, through its members and veterans, became easily the most influential Black Power organization in the District during the 1960s and early 1970s.

One of the biggest reasons that SNCC activists had such an impact on the city was their sheer numbers, with approximately three-dozen members migrating to the nation's capital after 1965. The District was, for these experienced grassroots organizers, an attractive destination. Many had attended Howard University and knew the city well. And being familiar with the city, many knew that the District was a black majority jurisdiction ruled by segregationists in Congress. Though the Voting Rights Act of 1965, for which these activists had risked their lives, was then bringing democracy to the South, residents of Washington, D.C. had no voting rights. This state of affairs moved some civil rights activists to view the nation's capital as the next major battleground of the movement, and many SNCC activists came here to commence a new voting rights fight. "Many of us moved here," former SNCC field secretary Larry Rubin argued, "because we saw the fight for D.C. home rule as a logical extension of the effort to help African Americans in the South gain the right to vote."<sup>25</sup> Many also moved to the city for a job. A number found employment in the Institute for Policy Studies under the sponsorship of Marc Raskin. Others began teaching in the Black Studies Program at Federal City College, founded in 1969. By this time, the number of SNCC activists in the city had grown to such an extent that many of their comrades moved to the District simply to fellowship with their movement buddies or to join their pre-existing activist projects run by SNCC alumni.<sup>26</sup>

The Black Power era dawned in the District with several SNCC activists experimenting with ideas of self-determination, self-love, and self-defense through a variety of projects. As discussed above, in early 1966, Marion Barry, working out of the SNCC office, initiated the Free D.C. campaign for the express purpose of rallying the city's black majority around the principle

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<sup>24</sup> "SNCC Rebuffs Barry, Hires a Funds Raiser," *Washington Post*, Aug 10, 1966. "Barry Quits SNCC Post to Aid Poor," *Washington Post*, Jan 19, 1967. "Carmichael Sets Sights on D.C." *Evening Star*, Apr 30, 1967. "Volley of Gunfire Hits SNCC Office," *Washington Post*, Sep 9, 1968. "SNCC Without Carmichael Is Faltering," *Washington Post*, Sep 20, 1968. "SNCC Veterans, Remembering The Battle," *Washington Post*, Jan 2, 1990. Asch and Musgrove, *Chocolate City*, 258-272. Valk, *Radical Sisters*, 17-21 and 25-26.

<sup>25</sup> The Southern Christian Leadership Conference also considered conducting a major civil rights campaign in Washington, D.C. After making several forays into the city in 1965, Martin Luther King, Jr. instead chose to initiate a campaign in Chicago. Catherine Maddison, "In Chains 400 Years... And Still in Chains in DC!" The 1966 Free DC Movement and the Challenges of Organizing in the City," *Journal of American Studies*, Vol. 41, No. 1 (Apr., 2007), pp. 169-192. Larry Rubin quoted from email to George Derek Musgrove, Jan 22, 2014.

<sup>26</sup> Sherwood and Jaffe, *Dream City*, 104-105. James Garrett, phone interview with George Derek Musgrove, Nov 22, 2011. James Garrett, "Creating a Black Studies Department at Federal City College (UDC), 1968-1969," [https://blackpowerchronicles.org/cool\\_timeline/creating-a-black-studies-department-at-federal-city-college-udc-1968-1969](https://blackpowerchronicles.org/cool_timeline/creating-a-black-studies-department-at-federal-city-college-udc-1968-1969). Other articles and oral histories on the Black Power Chronicles website at <https://blackpowerchronicles.org> explain individual SNCC veterans' reasons for moving to Washington, D.C. in the late 1960s and 1970s.

of self-determination. In October 1966, SNCC national Chairman and Howard graduate Stokely Carmichael returned to campus to join a panel discussion on Black Power. His calls that students "be proud of your blackness" and "stop imitating the majority" helped to set in motion the black student movement on campus later that year. The movement would last for three years and involve more than 115 separate incidents of student activism.<sup>27</sup> Likewise, Barry and then D.C. SNCC Chairman Lester McKinnie's repeated brushes with the police in the U Street corridor moved them to organize around issues of self-defense. In March 1967, they created the Citizens Committee for Equal Justice after Barry was arrested and subsequently brutalized for jaywalking and resisting arrest. McKinnie was also arrested when he rushed to the scene to protest Barry's treatment. With police brutality being an increasing matter of urgency for residents—the police shot and killed a dozen African American men over the course of the year—the group not only succeeded in having the charges against Barry and his comrades dropped, but putting significant pressure on city leaders to exercise greater civilian oversight of the police.<sup>28</sup>

Barry, Carmichael and McKinnie would go on, in the next two years, to found some of the most influential Black Power organizations in the city. In 1967, Barry, along with Mary Treadwell and Rufus "Catfish" Mayfield, founded Pride, Inc. with a large grant from the Labor Department. In January 1968, Carmichael, then the most recognizable advocate of Black Power in the country, convened one hundred African American leaders to form the Black United Front, a coalition that sought to unify disparate black groups and speak with one voice for "a rightful and proportionate share in the decision making councils of the District, and rightful and proportionate control of the economic institutions in the Black community." For the next several years, the BUF was a ubiquitous presence in DC politics, weighing in on everything from highway construction, to gun control, to racism in Arlington high schools. Because it was a confederation of 17 black organizations, the BUF had wide influence, often setting the terms of debate on contentious issues like police reform.<sup>29</sup> McKinnie too, would remain busy during these years, founding the Ujamaa Afrikan Shop, an African clothing store, in January 1968, at 9th Street and Florida Avenue NW. McKinnie planned to use the proceeds from the store to open an independent black school and, indeed, he opened Ujamaa Shule the following May. Both institutions outlasted the Black Power movement. Ujamaa Shop operated through the late 1980s, shifting its focus to manufacturing and distributing Kwanzaa candles and other Afrocentric products.<sup>30</sup> McKinnie and his teachers expanded Ujamaa Shule grade by grade until they were

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<sup>27</sup> "Revival of Blackness is applauded at Howard," *Washington Post*, Oct 27, 1966. "Be proud of your race, Carmichael Urges Students in Black Power defense," *Evening Star*, Oct 27, 1966. Valk, *Radical Sisters*, 115-117.

<sup>28</sup> "New Civil Rights Group Charges Police Brutality," *Washington Post*, Apr 1, 1967. "Commissioners Discuss Barry Arrest in Secret: City Commissioners Discuss Barry Case," *Washington Post*, Apr 4, 1967. "Police Told To 'Fill Jails' In Protests: Congressmen Irked at Plan to Harass Private on His Beat," *Washington Post*, Apr 13, 1967. "Hobson Quits Group Protesting Police Because It Won't Use Sound Trucks," *Washington Post*, Apr 14, 1967. "CHARGES DROPPED," *Afro-American*, Sep 16, 1967. Sherwood and Jaffe, *Dream City*, 50-51.

<sup>29</sup> "Stokely Mute At Black United Front Parley," *Chicago Daily Defender*, Feb 17, 1968. "Negroes to Drive for Unity" *Washington Post*, Jan 11, 1968. "Black Front Presents Police-Control Plan," *Washington Post*, Oct 18, 1968. "Ex-Pastor Welds a Black, Vocal, Viable Group," *Washington Post*, July 16, 1970. "Agents Return Seized Office," *Washington Post*, June 30, 1972. "Absence Saps D.C. Influence: After 3-Year Absence, Activist Finds Local Influence Eroded," *Washington Post*, Nov 23, 1972. "Carmichael Here with New Project," *Evening Star*, Oct 31, 1972.

serving students from kindergarten through high school. Though the school lost students to charters in the 1990s, it continued to operate out of 1554 8th Street NW, in the heart of DC's Shaw neighborhood, into the 21st century.<sup>31</sup>



Jennifer Lawson and Judy Richardson featured on the cover of *Black Business Digest* inside Drum and Spear Bookstore, 1972.

<sup>30</sup> "The Natives Are Stylish This Year," *Washington Post*, May 2, 1971. "Local Blacks as 'Everyday Heroes,'" *Washington Post*, Nov 29, 1972. "Guide to Celebrations," *Washington Post*, Dec 20, 1979. "Kwanzaa Reaffirms Roots," *Washington Post*, Dec 26, 1986. "Kwanzaa Organizers Combine, Make Pan-African Unity Top Priority," *Washington Informer*, Dec 13, 2018. Baba El Senzengalkulu Zulu, phone interview with George Derek Musgrove, 1/10/20. <https://www.ujamaaschool.net/about-us>.

<sup>31</sup> "Civil Rights Pioneer Continues Struggle in the Classroom" *Washington Informer*, Feb 7, 2013. "Charter schools threaten the existence of Black traditional schools," *Afro-American Red Star*, Oct 14, 2006.

Just one month after McKinnie founded his school, a large contingent of his SNCC comrades opened Drum and Spear Bookstore. SNCC veteran Charlie Cobb had come up with the idea for the store after visiting the Presence Africaine bookstore in Paris and securing start-up funding from the Episcopal Church and the United Church of Christ. He pulled in Judy Richardson, Jennifer Lawson, Courtland Cox, and Curtis Hayes (later Curtis Muhammad), all veterans of the southern movement, as well as Marvin Holloway and Anne Forrester Holloway, both of whom were scholars grounded in African history, and they opened the store in Columbia Heights at 14th and Fairmont streets NW. Later, SNCC's Ralph Featherstone, a former D.C. speech teacher and Freedom School coordinator during 1964 Mississippi Freedom Summer, became the store's manager. The store carried a wide range of authors from Africa and the diaspora, from W.E.B. DuBois and Zora Neale Hurston to Wole Soyinka and Aime Cesaire. The store was also unique in carrying a large selection of children's books focused on the history and culture of African American and other communities of color. Many of these titles were the product of Drum and Spear Press, founded in summer 1968 and located just a few blocks to the west at 1802 Belmont Road NW. The Press published everything from *Bubbles*, noted children's book author Eloise Greenfield's first book, to a reprint of C.L.R. James' *A History of Pan African Revolt*, and *Enemy of the Sun*, a collection of Palestinian protest poetry. The store also functioned as a community center, drawing residents of the upper 14th Street area to lectures and book signings by Black Power poets, activists and writers like Gwendolyn Brooks, Shirley DuBois, LeRoi Jones (later Amiri Baraka), Don L. Lee (now Haki Madhubuti), Toni Morrison and others. In addition, store cofounder Judy Richardson and former SNCC staffer Mimi Hayes created a weekly children's story hour, *Saa Ya Watoto*, that aired on WOL radio. As an example of the cross-pollination of artists and activists within D.C.'s Black Power movement, Eric Marlow of the New Thing Art and Architecture Center (see Theme 4 below) illustrated Greenfield's *Bubbles* and provided live drums and other percussion for the story hour.

By the early 1970s, Drum and Spear had become the largest black bookstore, by volume of books sold, in the country. The business even expanded downtown and overseas. In response to black employee demands, Drum and Spear opened Maelezo, a black bookstore in the Department of Health Education and Welfare building in Southwest. Drum and Spear Press also opened a printing press in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania (home to a number of SNCC expatriates). These activities brought law enforcement surveillance—indeed, as historian Joshua Davis argues, more FBI surveillance than any other black bookstore in the nation. In 1970, the store moved around the corner to 1371 Fairmont Street, where it would remain until an economic recession and the black community's decreasing interest in Black Power forced it to close in 1974.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> "Ghetto Book Shop Finds Untapped Literary Mart," *Washington Post*, Aug 27, 1968. "You Are What You Read: Sketches of six special bookstores" *Washington Post*, Nov 12, 1972. Josh Davis, "The FBI's War on Black Owned Bookstores," *Atlantic*, Feb 19, 2018. Russell, *We Are an African People: Independent Education, Black Power, and the Radical Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 211-212. Joshua Davis, *From Head Shops to Whole Foods* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), 19-20, 56-59, and 68-70. "Drum and Spear Books Founded," SNCCdigital.org: <https://snccdigital.org/events/drum-and-spear-books-founded>.



Acting Chairman of the Pilot District Project Marion Barry (in striped shirt) and UPO liaison to the PDP Calvin Rolark (in dark glasses) lead meeting, February 28, 1970. Reprinted with permission of the DC Public Library, Star Collection © Washington Post.

Before 1968 had ended, SNCC activists would get elected to chair the board of the Pilot District Project, the city's experiment in community control of the police (Marion Barry), host sprinter John Carlos on his visit to the District (Carmichael, Koko Barnes, H. Rap Brown), and create the Black Studies Department at Federal City College (James "Jimmy" Garrett). The last of these had a significant long term impact. Federal City College opened in the fall of 1968 with a mission of helping its students and the D.C. community to "rehumanize the city" by exploring and finding answers to the problems associated with "the ghetto." The student body was 95% black. During the first quarter, a small group of faculty proposed that all students be required to take courses "designed to deal with embedded racial prejudices." The Provost rejected it. In response, these professors created a working group for the purpose of creating a Black Studies Department. The group was headed by creative writing professor and SNCC veteran Jimmy Garrett, who had helped found the Black Studies program at his alma mater, San Francisco State University, the year before. The group's proposal called for a four-year program with a separate college structure and degree granting privileges. This college of Black Studies was to be huge, commanding as many as half of the faculty positions at FCC. The authors of the proposal acknowledged its hybrid academic/activist slant in their proposal, writing, "... the Program is at once a cultural and educational vehicle for creative awareness, confidence, and determination of Black people." The first two years of the degree program would be devoted to "the decolonization of the mind of the student and the development of interpretive skills necessary to define... the relations between our history as a people and our present situation." The second two years would be focused on acquiring the technical skills that students would need to help the

black community at home, in the diaspora, and in Africa. Early in the third quarter (January and February, 1969) the FCC faculty accepted a paired down version of the proposal, thereby creating the Black Studies Department. The following May, however, amidst Congressional disapproval—including one committee's trumped up charge that Garrett was a "gunrunner" for the Black Panther Party—Garrett announced that he was withdrawing the Black Studies proposal. Calling FCC a "plantation," Garrett stated that staying on campus put the "minds of black people" in the hands of Congress. Determined to claim "independence," he brokered a monetary settlement with the FCC and used the money to set up the independent Center for Black Education in two large row houses at 14th and Fairmont Streets in Columbia Heights, just steps away from Drum and Spear.<sup>33</sup> The Center's "fundamental purpose," its founders argued, echoing the FCC Black studies proposal, was the "preparation of a small group of black people to spend their lives in direct service to our people and our land." Maintaining close ties with several FCC faculty, like the Pan-Africanist C.L.R. James (SNCC organizers had convinced James to move to the District in 1968 and secured a job for him at FCC), the CBE drew on them to staff its free public lectures and classes. When at FCC, Garrett had recruited a number of SNCC veterans to teach in the Black Studies Department and many worked with him to found the CBE, including Charlie Cobb and Courtland Cox. Initially focused on training African Americans in the sciences so that they could help newly independent African nations, the CBE soon turned toward creating parallel community institutions like its children's school, free medical clinic (which saw approximately 200 patients per week), and library.<sup>34</sup>

Just a few blocks west of the CBE lay Meridian Hill Park, the largest green space near the cluster of Black Power organizations that dotted the area around 14th and U Streets. Many Black Power activists had claimed it as their own, and in 1969, SNCC veteran Jan Bailey decided to rename the park in honor of the man who he and many of his fellow organizers saw as the progenitor of Black Power ideology: Malcolm X. In preparation for the anniversary of Malcolm X's birthday, May 19, the Malcolm X Memorial Committee, led by Bailey, called on the city to rename Meridian Hill Park in the slain Muslim minister's honor. (The park is owned by the National Park Service and a formal name change would require an Act of Congress. The Council had the power to change the name of the park in an unofficial manner, much as it does with street names, but not officially.) The Memorial Committee also planned a series of events on May 18 and 19, called on merchants to close their shops both days, and called on the city to close schools early on May 19. At the behest of school board member Julius Hobson, who knew Malcolm X and was a member of the Memorial Committee, the Board considered a resolution to close schools for half a day on May 19. Rather than approve Hobson's proposal, the board adopted a proposal offered by Anita Allen mandating that D.C. schools include "Malcolm X and other leaders of various political stripes and points of view" in Afro-American history classes. Though the Council did not act on the memorial committee's request to rename the park, by April 1970

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<sup>33</sup> "Teacher Denies Buying Guns for Black Panthers," *Afro American* (Baltimore), July 5, 1969. George Derek Musgrove, "A BA in Revolution: The Federal City College Black Studies Program and the Limits of Black Power Education in Washington, DC," unpublished paper, in possession of the author. James Garrett, phone interview with George Derek Musgrove, Nov 22, 2011. James Garrett, "The Center for Black Education: An Historical Sketch (1969-1974)," at [https://blackpowerchronicles.org/cool\\_timeline/the-center-for-black-education-an-historical-sketch-1969-1974](https://blackpowerchronicles.org/cool_timeline/the-center-for-black-education-an-historical-sketch-1969-1974).

<sup>34</sup> "Trouble at Federal City College?" *Evening Star*, April 15, 1970. "Black Voices," *Afro-American*, Aug 9, 1969. Seth Markle, "'We are not tourists': The Black Power Movement and the Making of Socialist Tanzania, 1960-1974," (dissertation, New York University, 2011), 239-289, *We Are an African People*, 172, 206-211, and 319-321.

the *Washington Post* referred to the area as "Malcolm X Park" while in November 1970 the *Evening Star* wrote that the park was "known to the community" by that name.<sup>35</sup>

As Black Power activists turned toward Pan-African organizing in the early 1970s, SNCC veterans were again at the forefront. In 1971 SNCC organizers Courtland Cox and Jimmy Garrett as well as local Black Power organizers Geri Stark, Sylvia Hill, Judy Claude, Edie Wilson, Marvin Halloway, and Kathy Flewellen, established the Temporary Secretariat of the Sixth Pan-African Congress (or Six-PAC) in the offices of Drum and Spear Press. The group would later move its operation to the Center for Black Education. C.L.R. James, who lived nearby on 16th Street and served as an advisor to the young activists, summed up the purpose of Six-PAC succinctly to the *Afro-American* newspaper: "The major issue at the conference is for black people to get out of our subordinate position... to emerge completely and be an absolutely free and independent people." The organizers hoped to do this by convincing the delegates to create a permanent Pan-Africanist Secretariat within the Organization of African Unity, the inter-governmental organization that then sought to coordinate continent-wide cooperation, that could provide technical assistance to newly independent, developing nations and anti-colonial activists in countries still ruled by European states. The Temporary Secretariat would handle much of the planning for the meeting. They also led a 200-person U.S. delegation to the June 19–27, 1974 conference in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. Though critical in planning the meeting, the D.C. organizers' goals were largely frustrated. As activists, academics, and community organizers (U.S. elected and appointed officials declined to attend, arguing that the organizers were too radical), they lacked the knowledge of diplomatic conventions and the clout of being an official state delegation, placing them at a distinct disadvantage in their negotiations with the representatives of African and Caribbean governments. The conference ended without passing any of their favored resolutions, establishing a continuing Secretariat, or setting a date for a follow up meeting. Though unsuccessful in achieving their objectives, the organizers, most just a few years out of college, had succeeded in coordinating the first Pan-African Congress in 31 years, and the first on the African continent. Perhaps equally important, the experience and contacts these activists developed through this endeavor greatly aided in their future foreign policy work; namely their late 1970s and 1980s efforts to end apartheid in South Africa and aid neighboring "frontline states" that opposed apartheid but had been economically dependent on South Africa.<sup>36</sup>

As the 1970s wore on, SNCC activists continued to serve as important Black Power organizers in the city. For example, they helped to organize the 1972 African Liberation Day (Florence Tate and Tim Jenkins), founded the D.C. branch of the All-African People's Revolutionary Party in 1972 (Stokely Carmichael and Bob Brown), founded the a capella group

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<sup>35</sup> "Plans Set To Honor Malcolm X," *Washington Post*, May 4, 1969. "School Board Rejects, 4-3, Bid to Honor Malcolm X," *Evening Star*, May 16, 1969. "Malcolm X Observance Set," *Washington Post*, May 17, 1969. "Economic Calendar: SEC Actions," *Washington Post*, Sep 13, 1970. "Panther's Convention is still seeking a site," *Washington Post*, Nov 28, 1970.

<sup>36</sup> "Pan-African body prepares for first meet in 30 years," *Afro-American*, Feb 23, 1974. "African Congress ends with plans but no script," *New York Amsterdam News*, July 20, 1974. Seth Markle, "We Are Not Tourists: The Black Power Movement and the Making of Socialist Tanzania, 1960-1974," (Ph.D. dissertation, New York Univ., 2011), 239-289. Fanon Che Wilkins, "A Line of Steel: The Organization of the Sixth Pan-African Congress and the Struggle for International Black Power, 1969-1974," in *The Hidden 1970s: Histories of Radicalism*, Dan Berger, ed. (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2010), 97-114. Rickford, *We Are An African People*, 232-38. Sylvia Hill, interviewed by William Minter, Washington, D.C., Sep 23, 2003, at [www.nocasyvictories.org/interviews/int16\\_hill.php](http://www.nocasyvictories.org/interviews/int16_hill.php).



Sweet Honey in the Rock in 1973 (Bernice Johnson Reagon) and, the following year, lead the campaign to ratify the Home Rule charter (John Wilson). Many of these same organizers would remain active well into the 1980s, joining the administration of Mayor Marion Barry (Barry, Courtland Cox, Ivanhoe Donaldson, and Karen Spellman) or serving on the Council (Frank Smith and John Wilson).<sup>37</sup>

## Theme 4: The Black Arts Movement

A critical layer of Black Power was the Black Arts Movement. Rooted in the Black Power impulse to celebrate black history and culture, the Black Arts Movement is widely understood to have begun in 1965, when Leroi Jones (later Amiri Baraka) founded the Black Arts Repertory Theater in Harlem, New York. Jones's idea that black poets, playwrights, painters and musicians should make art that stimulated black consciousness, thereby moving black people to strike out for their liberation, quickly spread across the country. A frequent visitor to the District, Jones helped to seed the Black Arts Movement in the nation's capital by working with local poet and anti-poverty organizer Gaston Neal.

A native of Pittsburgh, Neal moved to the nation's capital in the mid-1950s. Though a member of the interracial beat poetry scene in that decade, by the mid-1960s he embraced art as a weapon in the battle against black poverty and low self-esteem. In 1965, Neal joined with two other UPO workers to create the Cardozo Area Arts Committee, an organization that operated from 1965 to 1967. In that short period of time, the Arts Committee sponsored three large events: a November 1965 black art show, the Three Days of Soul music festival in March 1966, and a 1966 drama festival. By far the largest of the three events was Three Days of Soul, at which LeRoi Jones served as the master of ceremonies and traced the history of black music from its roots in Africa up to the 1960s. Though Jones was the headliner, the presentation was primarily staffed by local artists. Through this celebration of black music and culture, Neal stated, the Arts Committee hoped "to deal a death blow to the psychology of self-hatred... the psychology that contributes so much to the poverty syndrome of this city's black population."<sup>38</sup>

Though Three Days of Soul was a success, Jones' presence brought congressional disapprobation, causing a strain between Neal and UPO. Soon after the event, congressional conservatives put pressure on the UPO not to fund Black Power activists like Jones. UPO, in turn, put pressure on Neal to make his events less controversial. Unwilling to be subject to such constraints, Neal made plans to leave the organization. In fall 1966, Neal and Elijah Smith, with the help of Donald Freeman (now Baba Lumumba) and Rimsky Atkinson joined with nine additional neighborhood activists to create the New School of Afro American Thought, a community supported (as opposed to government funded) cultural center. Over the course of the

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<sup>37</sup> Komozi Woodard, *A Nation Within a Nation: Amiri Baraka (Leroi Jones) and Black Power Politics* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1999), 175-178. "Carmichael Says Politics 'Not Answer'," *Washington Post*, Oct 18, 1972. Peniel Joseph, *Waiting til the Midnight Hour: A Narrative History of Black Power in America* (New York, 2007), 290. Bob Brown, phone interview with the author, Jan 3, 2020. "Singing the Black Saga," *Washington Post*, Feb 12, 1975. "Home Rule Landslide Predicted: Overwhelming Margin Predicted for Home Rule," *Washington Post*, Mar 19, 1974. Asch and Musgrove, *Chocolate City*, 384-401.

<sup>38</sup> "LeRoi Jones to Narrate Cardozo Music Fete," *Evening Star*, March 13, 1966. "Cardozo Plans Festival Tracing Negro Music," *Evening Star*, Jan 28, 1966. "Programs of the Week," *Evening Star*, Mar 20, 1966. "BLACK ARTS: The Creative Spirit," *Washington Post*, Jan 26, 1969. Rickford, *We Are an African People*, 212-213.

next five years, the Center grew into a workshop, school, organizing space, performance venue, and gallery—a veritable "factory for black minds" in Neal's words. The New School offered classes in black history, arts, African languages, writing, sewing, martial arts, and first aid to residents of Shaw, Columbia Heights and the surrounding neighborhoods, all for free. At its height the New School was offering as many as 22 classes at a time and hundreds of residents took advantage. Though well known as an educational and organizing space, the New School was also well known as a performance venue. Organizers regularly hosted poetry readings and jazz concerts, sometimes even shutting down 14th Street between Florida and V streets for the larger shows. Though remarkably productive, the New School suffered from internal ideological disputes, money troubles, and government harassment. Neal was so troubled by these issues that he stepped away from running the center in 1969 and, in 1971, the center closed its doors for good.<sup>39</sup>

Undoubtedly one of the biggest problems that organizations like the New School faced was a lack of resources. Because it refused to accept federal or foundation money, it was perpetually short of operating capital and supplies. Not so for the Anacostia Neighborhood Museum and the New Thing Art and Architecture Center, which were generously funded by federal and foundation grants. In 1967, the Smithsonian Institution, under the direction of S. Dillon Ripley, pushed to establish a community museum in a black neighborhood in Washington, D.C. With financial support from the Carnegie Foundation and several other private donors, it selected Southeast as its target neighborhood and hired John Kinard, a 30-year-old former football coach and Neighborhood Youth Corps worker (based at Southeast House) as its first director. Kinard mobilized volunteer help from the community to transform the old Carver Movie Theater on Nichols Avenue SE into a "neighborhood museum." Once the building was ready, the Smithsonian installed a mini zoo, skeleton collection, and space capsule, among other exhibits, and the museum opened to the public in the fall of 1967. With neighborhood excitement for the museum high, 4,000 residents attended opening day and 800 a week visited in the first year. Open to feedback from the community through its advisory board, the Museum regularly remade itself to respond to the changing interests of the largely young patrons that walked through its doors. It established a Center for African American History and Culture, housed nearby on Talbert Street SE, which created exhibits. In 1970, the Museum added a "Research Center on Urban Problems," for the purpose of "provide[ing] the community with information, facts, and figures, on which to act," stated Kinard.<sup>40</sup> Around the same time as Kinard was cleaning out the Carver Theater, back across the river in Adams Morgan, former Howard architecture student Colin "Topper" Carew and painter/musician Lloyd McNeill were founding the New Thing Art and Architecture Center. It grew quickly. By 1969 the organization had 55 instructors, who taught hundreds of students out of the organization's office on Columbia Road, dance studio at 18th and California streets, and karate and silk screening studio at Florida Avenue and T Street. Less overtly political than the New School, New Thing teachers hoped to stimulate community activism through culture. As Carew put it, the New Thing aimed to "acknowledge, through black art, that we want something better for ourselves than American

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<sup>39</sup> "Negro Arts, History School Will Open Today in Cardozo," *Washington Post*, Oct 15, 1966. "Black Culture bookshop opens today," *Washington Post*, May 31, 1968. "New School of Afro American Thought," *Black World/Negro Digest*, June 1967, 8-14. Rickford, *We Are an African People*, 211-214.

<sup>40</sup> "Anacostia Museum to Be Lively Spot," *Washington Post*, July 2, 1967. "Nothing Stuffy About Museum," *Washington Post*, Nov 5, 1967. "Urban Research in Anacostia," *Washington Post*, May 20, 1970.

Society presently has to offer... our standards of beauty and worth in art must reflect what we really are as a people."<sup>41</sup>

Black Power organizers' focus on arts and culture extended beyond the creation of specific organizations and influenced the very sights, sounds and feel of black neighborhoods. Each summer in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the city's parks came alive with art and music festivals. Notably, the entire city celebrated black art each spring between 1972 and 1975 when the city hosted Human Kindness Day—the oddly named month-long celebration of black art and culture organized by the local activist organization Compared to What? and sponsored by the National Park Service and the D.C. Recreation Department. Even in the colder months, musicians gathered each Sunday (starting in 1965) in Malcolm X Park for a drum circle.<sup>42</sup> WHUR, the city's first black-owned radio station, interspersed its political and news programming with jazz, soul, and funk, while the disc jockeys on WOL popularized the nickname "Chocolate City" in between spinning R&B hits. Five "walls of respect"—murals that depicted national activists like Malcolm X and Marcus Garvey as well as neighborhood organizers—graced buildings in Shaw and Columbia Heights. In those same neighborhoods, African Americans could shop for dashikis, bubas and lappas at Zaro's House of Africa at 315 7th Street; Ujamaa African Shop at 900 Florida Avenue; The African Shop at 1900 Q Street, and the Pan-African Specialty Shop at 3622 Georgia Avenue. And on seemingly every light pole and storefront in between, one could see colorful posters by the Black Power artists Lou Stovall and Lloyd McNeill announcing festivals, musical performances, organizing campaigns, and the like.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> "The New Thing: An Innovative Cultural Center," *Washington Post*, Aug 9, 1969. "BLACK ARTS: The Creative Spirit," *Washington Post*, Jan 26, 1969. Rickford, *We Are an African People*, 214-215.

<sup>42</sup> "Why Some Meridian Hill Park Drummers Say The Beat Isn't What It Used To Be," *WAMU.org*, Nov 6, 2015. See also the Facebook page of the "Friends of Malcolm X Park Drum Circle" at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/MalcolmXParkdrumcircle>.

<sup>43</sup> James Gibson, "Black Arts: the Creative Spirit," *Washington Post*, Jan 26, 1969. "The Natives Are Stylish This Year," *Washington Post*, May 2, 1971.



Human Kindness Day was held annually on the National Mall from 1972 to 1975. (photo © Nancy Shia)

Members of the D.C. Black Arts Movement also tried their hand at so-called high art and founded several theater and dance companies in the early 1970s. Following the April 1968 revolt, Mayor Walter Washington called Washington native Robert Hooks, an actor and founder of New York's Negro Ensemble Company, and asked him to come home to create a local company. Hooks did. After two years of fundraising, he renovated the old Colony Theater on Georgia Avenue in Petworth and founded the Black Repertory Theater Company. In October 1971, the Company staged its first play, "Imamu," inspired by the writings of poet and activist Amiri Baraka. For the next several years, the Company put on a number of original works to rave reviews and developed young actors from D.C. free of charge. (It also hosted a spin off Black Repertory Dance Company.) The theater received solid support from city residents, with lines snaking up Georgia Avenue on opening nights. Business became so good that the company had to open a rehearsal theater at Georgia and New Hampshire avenues, just south of the main location. In the mid-1970s, however, it received fewer grants and never, in Hook's telling, received the support he had anticipated from the city's theater going elite. "These were people who, when they came down Georgia Avenue, they locked their car doors," he argued. "They weren't going to come to the Colony Theatre because they didn't think they were safe in the neighborhood." Others argued that the Company failed to fill the seats because it staged most of its plays as "ritual theater"—a combination of dance, drama, and music that was popular with Black Power audiences but not with the more traditional theater-going public. The Company also began to face competition. Since the Company opened in 1971, local artists had opened three black drama companies in the city—Black American Theater, Black Drama Collective, and Paul

Robeson Theater—and had begun competing for a finite audience. With bills that had grown far beyond his ability to pay, Hooks abruptly shut down the equity company that had funded the theater in 1976.<sup>44</sup>

Though its life in the city was short, the Black Repertory Theater left a rich legacy. Not only did it seed a larger black theater and dance scene— indeed in late 1976 it rejoined that scene as “The Black Rep.,” a scaled down version of the previous company— but it also birthed the acapella singing group Sweet Honey in the Rock. Sweet Honey in the Rock began as a vocal workshop at the Black Repertory Theater Company in 1973. Led by former Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Freedom Singer and vocal director at the Black Rep., Bernice Johnson Reagon, the group consisted of four women: Johnson, Louise Robinson, Carol Lynn Mailord, and Lee Turry. Though the membership of the group often changed, it is perhaps best known for the six women that worked together during the 1980s (Bernice Reagon, Ysaye Barnwell, Evelyn Harris, Aishah Kahlil, Yasmeen Williams, and sign language performer Shirley Childress Johnson) when they produced some of their most affecting protest music. The groups' songs ranged from old gospel standards and reworked jazz tunes, to protest anthems about nuclear waste, South African apartheid, and deported South American immigrants. In 1983, Joseph Camp directed a one hour documentary, "Gotta Make This Journey," on the singers/activists, and for much of the next thirty years the group toured constantly in the U.S. and abroad, producing twenty albums along the way. Though Reagon left the group in 2004, Sweet Honey in the Rock continues to tour and record today.<sup>45</sup>

When Black Power organizers took over the city government in the mid-to-late 1970s, they embedded their Black Arts organizing in city institutions. In 1976, for instance, former Howard University student leader and Drum and Spear Bookstore manager Tony Gittens established the Black Film Institute at the University of the District of Columbia. In the late 1970s and 1980s, the Institute staged a series of popular programs, including screenings featuring everything from mainstream releases to obscure documentaries, a lecture series, and a young filmmakers workshop. And it reached a broad audience. Through collaborations with the Washington Area Filmmakers League, Kennedy Center, Mayor’s office, and District of Columbia Public Library, the BFI brought films to the community, holding screenings in the Foxtrappe and Clubhouse nightclubs, senior citizen homes, and Lorton Prison among other locations. For twenty years, before Gittens moved on to co-found the Washington D.C. International Film Festival (1986) and became director of the D.C. Commission on the Arts and Humanities (1996), the BFI made black and Third World film a staple of the city’s cultural landscape.<sup>46</sup> Marion Barry took a similar approach after he was elected Mayor. In one of his first acts, in early 1979, Barry hung huge Senegalese tapestries outside his office and invited city

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<sup>44</sup> "Success, Survival and the Black Repertory," *Washington Post*, Dec 1, 1974. "The Rep Revived," *Washington Post Magazine*, September 7, 1980. "Longtime African American actor Robert Hooks on the state of black theater, then and now," *Washington Post*, October 26, 2018.

<sup>45</sup> "Singing the Black Saga," *Washington Post*, Feb 12, 1975. "'Sweet Honey' Tastes Flavor of Success On Its Anniversary," *Washington Post*, Nov 17, 1983. "New Struggles In Sweet Harmony," *Washington Post*, Feb 23, 1983. "Singing the Freedom Song: Bernice Reagon," *Washington Post*, June 25, 1987. "Profile: Sweet Honey in the Rock's Sacred Music Roots," *NPR*, Nov 11, 2005. [sweethoneyintherock.org/about](http://sweethoneyintherock.org/about)

<sup>46</sup> "A New Black Film Institute Series," *Washington Post*, May 18, 1977. "Black Film Institute 1976-1986; A Decade of Growth, Diversity and Service," 1986, accessed at <http://www.lrdudc.wrlc.org/BlackFilmReview/bfrindex.html>. "Filmfest's Gittens To Head Arts Panel," *Washington Post*, Sep 10, 1996.

residents to come down to the District Building to see them.<sup>47</sup> This act would be the first of many where the Mayor gave public sanction to black art in the 1970s and 80s. In 1980, for instance, when the National Conference of Artists, a twenty-two year old organization of 1,000 black artists, held its national conference in Washington, D.C., Barry declared their time in the city “Afro-American Visual Artists’ Week” and directed the Martin Luther King Jr. Library to assist the organizers by hosting a showcase of young African American artists. The conference would seed several of the local black art galleries that would dot the District in the next decade.<sup>48</sup>

## **Theme 5: Black Student Activism and Black Independent Schools**

The dramatic demographic changes that enveloped the city in the 1950s and 60s plunged the D.C. school system into crisis. Unable to stop desegregation, many white parents moved out of the city. Between 1954 and 1965 the number of white children in the D.C. schools dropped from 49,106 to just 15,364. Most of those who remained were clustered in the majority white neighborhoods west of Rock Creek Park or segregated in the “honors” track within majority black schools to the east. At the behest of Black Power activist Julius Hobson, a federal judge ordered the neighborhood school and tracking systems reformed in 1967 (*Hobson v. Hansen*). Yet the decision did little to improve the quality of education for the vast majority of poor black students.<sup>49</sup> A similar crisis enveloped the city’s college campuses. Though the city was nearly 70% black by the late 1960s, predominantly white schools like George Washington University and Georgetown boasted only a handful of black students and a racist campus culture replete with lily white fraternities, some of which staged blackface performances.

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<sup>47</sup> “Barry’s Knights of the Round Tables: Status Symbols and Senegalese Art Take Over City Hall Round Tables and Art Invade City Hall,” *Washington Post*, Mar 2, 1979.

<sup>48</sup> “Black Artists - Vivid Scenes and Urban Images,” *Evening Star*, Apr 2, 1980. “The Art of Clout: 1,000 Blacks Who ‘Happen to be Artists,’” *Washington Post*, Apr 3, 1980. “Uncovering an Afro-American Treasure-Trove,” *Washington Post*, Mar 14, 1980.

<sup>49</sup> Asch and Musgrove, *Chocolate City*, 316 and 339-341.



Members of the Organization of African and Afro-American Students, American University, in a 1969 *Talon* yearbook photo. First row, seated, from left: OASATAU co-founders Joseph Harris, Moussa Foster, Atiba Coppock. Middle row: Leon Langford, Barbara Gardner, Roberta Gill, Cecelia Vilakazi, Paula Rhodes, Fern Davis, Wanda Dabney. Top row: Unidentified, Gordon "Rashid" Stiles, Ron Burley, Leslie Epps, Mark Stevens, George Sitgraves, Larry Stone. Photo courtesy of the American University Archives and Special Collections.

Students at the college and secondary level demanded reform. On the city's college campuses, African American students formed black student unions to organize their student bodies, and staged walk-outs, sit-ins and marches to press their agenda. In fall 1967 the tiny number of black students at American University founded the Organization of African and Afro-American Students, while in April 1968 George Washington University students formed a Black Student Union.<sup>50</sup> Student activists not only demanded access to white campuses for black students, but also demanded that black universities like Howard direct their educational mission to aid the black freedom struggle; to become, in effect, a "Black [as opposed to integrationist] University." In March 1968, approximately 60 students interrupted the University's March 1 Charter Day celebration, demanding that Howard adopt a new charter that would "meet the needs

<sup>50</sup> "Students Seek 'Black Identity': University Negro Units Formed Here," *Washington Post*, Feb 19, 1968. "GWU to Weigh Students' Demands: History Course Voted," *Washington Post*, Apr 27, 1968.

of America's and the world's oppressed peoples." When the Administration refused their demand and attempted to punish the protesters, 1000 students packed into the school's Administration Building demanding the resignation of President Nabrit and the adoption of a "black oriented curriculum." The campus would be wracked by nearly constant protest for the next two years as students pushed a resistant administration to adopt their goals.<sup>51</sup>



Students re-christen Howard a "Black University" during the March 1968 occupation of the Administration Building. Reprinted with permission of the DC Public Library, Star Collection © Washington Post.

Though possessed of fewer resources, secondary school students staged a similar wave of protests. They advocated for community control of schools and, surprisingly, received a receptive audience from school administrators desperate to find workable educational models for "the ghetto." In 1968, Eastern High School students associated with the youth group Modern Strivers staged a series of protests arguing that their curriculum was producing "Negro mental paraplegics" and demanding that administrators add black studies to the curriculum. Eastern

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<sup>51</sup> "Howard Students Disrupt Ceremony," *Washington Post*, Mar 2, 1968. "Howard Students Sit In to Protest Charges: Charges Against Students Prompt Howard U. Sit-In," *Washington Post*, Mar 20, 1968. "Board Plan Ends Sit-in At Howard: Compromise Ends Protest by Students at Howard U." *Washington Post*, Mar 24, 1968. "Howard University Set To Reopen After Protest," *Washington Post*, Mar 25, 1968. "Bowie State Boycott Closes Most Classes: Bowie State's Student Boycott Held 90 Percent Effective," *Washington Post*, Mar 28, 1968. Valk, *Radical Sisters*, 119-120.



administrators adopted black studies classes and several foundations and the federal government provided funding for the Freedom School, an independent student-run black studies center from which students could receive credits in D.C. Public Schools. In its first year, as many as 110 students from Eastern and other D.C. public schools enrolled in the Freedom School, which was housed in the Sunday School facilities of Keller Memorial Lutheran Church at 907 Maryland Avenue NE (A white congregation whose membership had largely left for the suburbs). There, teachers offered classes in black history, black philosophy, Swahili, and black literature to Eastern students, though interest in the school quickly waned because students had succeeded in pushing the school board to offer these classes in regular classrooms.<sup>52</sup> In late 1968, students organized into the Student Coalition for Education Now had pressured the School Board to adopt classes in black history, African studies, and Swahili (as well as improved reading and sex education instruction). Board member Julius Hobson adopted the students' proposal and it passed the Board in June 1969. The funding quickly translated into new courses, with the Board introducing black history and Swahili during summer session. By the fall semester, some form of black studies courses were offered in all middle schools, high schools, and vocational schools in the District.<sup>53</sup> But this experiment did not slow black student protest. In February 1970, black students at four D.C. public high schools walked out demanding community control of the schools, and specifically a reduction in the police presence outside of schools. The walkouts started at Western High School in Glover Park on February 9, then spread to Roosevelt in Petworth, where approximately 30 students left classes the following day. In Tenleytown, Wilson students left classes after someone pulled a fire alarm on February 11, and in Takoma, Coolidge students walked out on February 12. The protests there were organized by 17 year-old Michael Blakey, the president of the Coolidge Black Student Union, and approximately 24 other students. Most of them were middle class graduates of Amidon Elementary and Jefferson Junior High School in Southwest, or had joined a December 1968 student conference organized by Julius Hobson. The students received encouragement and minor material help from the Blackman's Volunteer Army of Liberation, the Black Panther Party, the Center for Black Education, and Students for a Democratic Society.<sup>54</sup>

While students focused on securing black studies and community control, many Black Power activists worked to use education as a tool for fomenting revolution. These activists built *independent* black schools like the New School of Afro-American Thought (1966), Ujamaa Shule (1968), the Center for Black Education (1969), Nationhouse Watoto (1974), and Roots Activity Learning Center (1977). These institutions focused less on traditional instruction and more on training for revolution. Students at the Center for Black Education, for instance, were just as likely to take classes in Pan-African politics as mathematics. As time wore on and the revolutionary impulses of the Black Power movement receded, however, these schools shifted their emphasis on overthrowing the system to cultivating black consciousness. Nationhouse Watoto Shule, founded in 1974 and located north of Howard University at 503 Park Road NW, for example, reflected this turn away from revolution and toward personal behavior. Historian Russell Rickford notes that "In 1979... Washington's Nationhouse Watoto denounced

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<sup>52</sup> "Pupil-Run School For Black Studies Fails Test of Time," *Washington Post*, Nov 1, 1970.

<sup>53</sup> "Black Studies Approved by School Board," *Washington Post*, Feb 13, 1969. "Student Demands Are Met," *Washington Post*, June 25, 1969. "D.C. Schools Approve Black Studies Program," *Evening Star*, June 25, 1969.

<sup>54</sup> "Revolt Climbs Social Ladder," *Washington Post*, Mar 8, 1970.

chemically treated hairdos as “European” and encouraged black women to observe traditional braiding techniques as an alternative to processed styles.”<sup>55</sup>

## Theme 6: Self-Defense

A key grievance among D.C. African Americans was police brutality and disrespect. Though the city had become roughly 70% black by the late 1960s, the Metropolitan Police Department remained 80% white. Most officers lived in the suburbs and had roots in the South, and they regularly used epithets like ‘boy’ and ‘nigger’ to address black residents. Always rough, in the late 1960s police relations with the black community turned downright homicidal. Between January 1967 and October 1968 the police shot and killed no less than 13 African American men in altercations stemming from offenses as petty as stealing a bag of cookies and jaywalking. Black Power organizer Marion Barry, who himself was arrested in 1967 for jaywalking then brutalized when he resisted, called the police an “occupying army.”<sup>56</sup>

In the face of such violence, Black Power activists counseled self-defense. The term was vague. In the hands of some activists, it meant bearing arms for purposes of self-defense when attacked by white citizens. For others, albeit a smaller number, it could refer to violent wars of liberation (when envisioning the ghetto as an internal colony) or retaliatory violence against private citizens and police alike. At different moments in time, D.C. Black Power activists embraced both of these definitions. In the late 1960s, many local activists considered self-defense, even retaliatory violence, as a legitimate strategy in response to state repression, and paramilitary-style organizations gained significant support. The popularity of these organizations was undercut, however, by the federal government’s willingness to explore community control of the police in 1969 and the 1970 bombing death of SNCC activist Ralph Featherstone. By the early 1970s, self-defense still remained a viable strategy for only the most desperate of Black Power organizers, with the vast majority of D.C. Black Power activists having chosen the proverbial ballot over the bullet.

In 1966 and 1967 local activists created two organizations that appeared to embrace a quasi-military approach to organizing. Both, however, either fizzled or immediately turned from visions of revolutionary violence to a reality of reform.

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<sup>55</sup> “Guide to Celebrations,” *Washington Post*, Dec 20, 1979. “Community Briefs,” *Washington Informer*, Oct 8, 1986. “Black Private Schools: Academics With a Twist,” *Washington Post*, Aug 29, 1991. “At Private Schools, Awards Based on More Than Grades,” *Washington Post*, June 8, 1995. “Hundreds Attended Mamadi Nyasuma's Funeral,” *Washington Informer*, Feb 27, 2007. “NationHouse Students Show Musical Prowess,” *Washington Informer*, Feb 28, 2019. Rickford, *We are an African People*, 126, 248, 250, and 258. <https://nationhouse.org>.

<sup>56</sup> MPD officers killed four white men over the same period for a total of 17 people killed by police. “History of Police-Citizen Deaths In Washington Since January of 1967,” *Washington Post*, Oct 13, 1968. Barry quoted from “New Civil Rights Group Charges Police Brutality,” *Washington Post*, Apr 1, 1967.



Blackman's Volunteer Army of Liberation founder Col. Hassan Jeru-Ahmed (left) with several of his 'soldiers' outside one of the group's Blackman's Development Centers, date unknown. Reprinted with permission of the DC Public Library, Star Collection © Washington Post.

The city's largest and longest-lasting quasi military organization during the Black Power era was the Blackman's Volunteer Army of Liberation founded by Col. Hassan Jeru-Ahmed, a veteran and ex-con, in 1966. Jeru-Ahmed envisioned the group as a paramilitary force capable of liberating African colonies from their white rulers. "We will assist our brother in Africa in the liberation of their lands," Jeru-Ahmed told one reporter. Members wore black fatigues and black military style boots. They lived in a converted "barracks" at 1234 Upshur Street NW in Petworth, and were subject to military-style discipline including corporal punishment and detention in a makeshift jail. Despite his stated desire to deploy his troops overseas, by the late 1960s Jeru-Ahmed had put his Army to use closer to home, conducting anti-drug patrols, neighborhood cleanups, and rehabilitating houses in the Mount Pleasant and Capitol Hill areas. Jeru-Ahmed also used the group to staff his Blackman's Development Centers and the many projects and businesses of the Provisional Government of the United Moorish Republic, his religious organization. By 1971, the *Post* reported that the group boasted approximately 200 members. Though large and organized as a paramilitary group, the Blackman's Army was a conservative

organization. It mobilized its ‘soldiers’ as part of its business operations, or against drug dealers—often cooperating with police.<sup>57</sup>

A year after Jeru-Ahmed created the Blackman’s Army, UPO employee Robert Rippy organized approximately eight D.C. residents to create a D.C. chapter of the Black Panther Party. Rippy and his collaborators met with representatives of the BPP who screened new recruits and were told that they must undergo extensive self-defense training and political education before they would be accepted as a chapter. Impatient to form an organization, Rippy named his group the Black Defenders and began meeting openly. After a year of organizing, Rippy again petitioned the BPP to give his group chapter status, even going so far as to travel to Oakland to make his pitch to the Panther leadership in person. His visit coincided with the Central Committee’s decision to impose a moratorium on new chapters, however, as they feared that a flood of new members would bring increased police infiltration. Undeterred, Rippy reorganized his group into the United Black Brotherhood. They adopted a cultural nationalist politics at odds with the Marxism-Leninism of the BPP, and set up a headquarters in the back of Rippy’s wig shop on the 3100 block of Georgia Avenue. Wearing dashikis and joining the Black United Front, the UBB recruited from Howard University and in the surrounding neighborhoods. In 1970, when the Black Panther Party reversed course and set up a D.C. chapter, they viewed the UBB as competitors and denounced them as reactionary “bootlickers” in the party newspaper. They need not have been worried. The UBB struggled to recruit members or sustain organizing campaigns, and appears to have folded in 1971. The group received only one mention in a major D.C. newspaper during its entire existence.<sup>58</sup>

While Rippy and Jeru-Ahmed worked to strand up their paramilitary organizations, thousands of D.C. African Americans rushed ahead. Tired of police brutality and disrespect, many black Washingtonians, individually and often in an unorganized manner, pushed back against police mistreatment. In 1967—including a tense night on August 1, when several fires were set in Shaw between 7th and 14th streets and youth attacked police and firemen with rocks and bottles—*Washington Post* editor Ben Gilbert asserted that “street disorders requiring police action became regular, almost weekly occurrences.”<sup>59</sup> In April 1968, these small skirmishes became a citywide conflagration. Following the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. in Memphis, Tennessee, African Americans in Washington D.C.—as in roughly 120 other cities across the nation—staged a four-day revolt that heavily damaged the 14th Street, U Street, and 7th Street business corridors in Northwest, the H Street NE corridor, and the Nichols Avenue (now Martin Luther King Jr. Avenue) SE commercial district. The revolt began soon after former SNCC Chairman Stokely Carmichael began walking up and down U Street on April 4, demanding that stores close in honor of King, as they had in honor of President Kennedy five years earlier. Though most stores complied and Carmichael counseled nonviolence, the crowd that had gathered got out of control after a youth smashed the window at the People's Drug Store

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<sup>57</sup> “‘Blackman’s Army’ Sets Africa Coups,” *Washington Post*, Dec 26, 1966. “Black Unit Patrols Mt. Pleasant Area,” *Washington Post*, May 31, 1969. “Law School Protests Use Of Gen. Hassan’s Guards,” *Washington Post*, Nov 26, 1975.

<sup>58</sup> “Black Panther Drive Falter in D.C.: Black Panther Drive Falter in D.C.; Affluence of Negroes Cited,” *Washington Post*, Feb 1, 1970. John Preusser, “Exceptional Headwinds: The Black Panthers in DC,” in *The Black Panther Party in a City Near You*, Judson Jeffries, ed., Athens: Univ. of Georgia Press, 2018, 52-88. Valk, *Radical Sisters*, 52-88.

<sup>59</sup> Ben Gilbert et. al., *Ten Blocks from the White House: An Anatomy of the Washington Riots of 1968* (London: Pall Mall Publishers, 1968), 1-13.

on the corner of 14th and U, around 9:30 pm. Rioting soon engulfed the area and lasted late into the night. It would resume the following day and spread to nearly every quadrant of the city. Few were surprised by the violence. "You just can't expect people not to react this way," said Edward J. MacClane, president of the largely middle-class Federation of Civic Associations. "The city has been heading this way for a long time." When the smoke cleared on April 8, thirteen people lay dead, most from the fires, and around 900 businesses had been damaged. The destruction was far more extensive in Washington than other cities because a self-styled revolutionary group calling itself the Zulus systematically burned down as many stores as they could in hopes of escalating the violence into a full blown rebellion. The Zulus was an underground organization of about 17 men that one member called the "roguish element of the movement." Members focused their energies on harassing opponents of civil rights and Black Power. A former leader of the group said in an interview with the *Washington Post*, "Whenever we heard of any kind of negative thing in D.C. [like a store with discriminatory hiring policies] ... we might go in there and break the whole windows of those stores."<sup>60</sup>

The violence did not end after the revolt. Small scale skirmishes between police and African Americans periodically broke out in black communities for years after April 1968, typically sparked by instances of police brutality or harassment. In October 1968, for instance, students and teachers at the New School of Afro-American Thought led a sit-down strike in the middle of the intersection of 14th and U to protest the shooting death of a young black man named Elijah Bennett, by police officer David Roberts. Later that night the crowd burned a police car, smashed windows at the nearby Safeway, and burned the U.S. Parts Store at 2101 14th Street. The police used liberal amounts of tear gas to disperse the crowd and the violence did not spread. In September 1970, a drug raid at 14<sup>th</sup> and Fairmont in Columbia Heights led to three nights of rioting by neighborhood youth. Local activists and business owners had so little faith in the police that they formed nighttime "courtesy patrols" to restore order. Marion Barry explained their rationale, arguing that "the police would provoke young people, causing more violence."<sup>61</sup>

The violence of early 1968—both the police killings of African Americans and the revolt itself— increased the level of Black Power activism and redirected local activists away from direct confrontation with the police and toward reform. In summer 1968, the Black United Front canvassed the neighborhoods around the revolt epicenter and compiled their finding into a list of "13 demands" for police reform. With the MPD pushing back hard against the proposal and the Richard Nixon presidential campaign dubbing the District America's "crime capital," however, the demands went nowhere. In the midst of this political battle, Robert Shellow, a white psychologist within the federal Office of Economic Opportunity, developed the "Model Precinct Program," which would establish 24-hour storefront centers where neighborhood residents could have easy access to police as well as public health and welfare services. Shellow's plan also envisioned teenage "patrols" recruited to help police monitor suspicious activity, and it required officers to enroll in "sensitivity training" and black history courses. These programs would be overseen by an elected community board. The Police rejected the program as an erosion of their authority. Many African Americans rejected the program because no one at OEO had bothered to consult with community groups before funding it. OEO chose the 13th precinct, the epicenter of

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<sup>60</sup> Asch and Musgrove, *Chocolate City*, 355-360.

<sup>61</sup> Peter Milius, "Police Pelted In 14th Street Disturbance," *Washington Post*, Sep 22, 1970. Glenn Dixon, "'COURTESY PATROL' BEGUN: The Mayor Takes a Walk Along 14th Street," *Evening Star*, Sep 25, 1970.

Black Power activism in the city, for its experiment. Local activists, led by Marion Barry of Pride, Inc. and Charles Cassell of the Black United Front, determined to take a stand against the program. "This thing was forced on black people," Barry argued. "If we can't control it lets kick it out of here." When OEO continued with implementation despite vocal community opposition, Barry engineered a takeover of the project's elected citizen board, which subsequently selected him as chairman. With community activists firmly in control of the program's budget and the police firmly opposed to cooperating with them, the program did little, other than initiating some training and recruitment programs, before disbanding in 1973. It did, however, create a critical focal point for local activists to organize around the issue of police accountability and put pressure on the MPD to reform.<sup>62</sup>

Aside from the positive inducement of liberal reform to move activists away from revolt, there was also the negative inducement of the untimely death of Ralph Featherstone and William "Che" Payne. Featherstone and Payne died on March 9, 1970 when the car that they were driving exploded on Route 1 near Bel Air, Maryland. The two were in the area because their close friend, H. "Rap" Brown was on trial in the Bel Air courthouse for his alleged role in inciting the 1967 Cambridge, Maryland riot. Prosecutors had secured a change of venue to Bel Air seeking a jury pool with fewer blacks. Police and FBI quickly concluded that the two had been planning to plant explosives at the Bel Air courthouse when the bomb unexpectedly detonated. Many activists charged that the two had been killed by authorities who had been aiming for Brown. (In an atmosphere of official lawlessness directed at the black freedom struggle and increasingly desperate black left-wing violence against the state, both had strong circumstantial evidence to make their case in the court of public opinion. Interested parties remain divided in their interpretations to this day.) Featherstone was active in the D.C. Black Power movement as an administrator at the Center for Black Education and the Drum and Spear Bookstore, and over 300 activists, admirers, family and friends packed his March 19 wake at the Stewart Funeral Home on Benning Road NE. Whatever the cause of Featherstone and Payne's death, their loss prompted a great deal of soul searching among activists who had been in near constant conflict with the Metropolitan Police Department and the FBI for the previous five years.

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<sup>62</sup> "Pilot Police Project Will Dissolve Itself," *Washington Post*, Sep 9, 1973. Asch and Musgrove, *Chocolate City*, 285-288. Office of Economic Opportunity, *The People and the Police*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NITRDq-CsZo>.



The Black Panther Party announces its People's Revolutionary Constitutional Convention before a crowd of 1,000 at the Lincoln Memorial, June, 1970. Reprinted with permission of the DC Public Library, Star Collection © Washington Post.

The toll of police repression and the inducement of liberal reform caused even the best known advocates of self-defense to change course in the early 1970s. In late 1969 and early 1970, the Black Panther Party finally stood up a chapter in the nation's capital. It would peak at 100 members by 1971 and launch a number of important community service programs, including: a community center at 1322 17th Street NW; Hard Knocks University, which offered college level classes, from a storefront at the corner of 3rd and H streets NE; free breakfast and clothing programs; and a twice-a-week bus to Lorton penitentiary for relatives of the incarcerated. Yet the Panthers of the early 1970s were decidedly different from those of the late 1960s. Destabilized by police repression and infiltration, the national BPP leadership had decided to pivot to community service programs and electoral politics. The group may still have had the *reputation* of a gun toting paramilitary organization when it set up its office at 2327 18th Street NW, but it had since moved away from what many members called "the cult of the gun." Though by no means hostile to firearms and discussions of self-defense, the D.C. chapter devoted the overwhelming majority of its attention to community service.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> "Black Panther Chief Cleaver at AU, Rips Candidates and Vietnam War," *Washington Post*, Oct 19, 1968. "Black Panther Drive Falts in D.C.," *Washington Post*, Feb 1, 1970. "Police, D.C. Sued Over Panther Raid," *Washington Post*, Nov 7, 1970. "Panther Party," *Washington Post*, June 18, 1970. Preusser, "Exceptional Headwinds: The Black Panthers in DC," 52-88. Valk, *Radical Sisters*, 122-31. "DC Black Panthers, 1969-74," *Washington Area Spark*, [https://www.flickr.com/photos/washington\\_area\\_spark/sets/72157631398567310](https://www.flickr.com/photos/washington_area_spark/sets/72157631398567310). For a description of the transformation of the national Black Panther Party see Robyn Spencer, *The Revolution Has Come: Black Power, Gender, and the Black Panther Party in Oakland* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 143-176.

The one place where self-defense continued to have strong resonance into the 1970s was behind prison walls, where the situation was becoming increasingly dire and peaceful protest was not allowed. On October 11, 1972, approximately 50 inmates held in Cellblock 1 of the D.C. Jail took D.C. Corrections Director Kenneth Hardy and eleven guards hostage. Many prisoners had complained of vermin infestations, youth housed with adults, lack of medical treatment and other issues for some time before the revolt. Inspired by the prison uprising in Attica, New York one month earlier, the inmates sidestepped these issues and demanded “freedom.” *Washington Post* reporter William Claiborne, who had been sent into the prison as a member of a negotiating team that included Marion Barry and UPO organizer Petey Greene, noted upon emerging from the facility, “It’s not a riot. It’s a revolution. They say they are fed up with being treated like animals. They do not want to discuss their grievances. They just want out.” With the prisoners putting forward such inflexible demands, Director Hardy feared that negotiations would go nowhere and he would be killed. However repression again moved a group of black activists from the path of revolution to reform. The prisoners abandoned their revolt, Hardy claimed, when they marched to the Cellblock door, saw the large crowds of police and prison guards outside, and realized “they weren’t going to be allowed out... [that] I no longer had the authority to accede to their one demand.” Hardy and all of the hostages were subsequently released after authorities pledged not to retaliate against the inmates. The ordeal had lasted 15 hours. Immediately upon retaking the prison, however, guards began beating prisoners and confiscating their belongings. Several of the inmates staged a second revolt on October 13 in protest of prison conditions. It lasted three hours and was immediately ended when guards donning riot gear showed up in force. (In February 1974, four of the prisoners who had led the revolt were found guilty of conspiracy, kidnapping, armed robbery, attempted escape and riot.)<sup>64</sup> Facing similar conditions across town, on April 18, 1973, nearly half of the inmates at the D.C. Women’s Detention Center staged their own protest. Unlike the men, the women remained peaceful, staging a sit-in in which they demanded “improved medical treatment, extended work release and furlough programs, and other reforms.” On April 19, Corrections Director Delbert C. Jackson promised to respond to the protesters’ demands in writing, effectively ending the sit-in. The corrections department, however, refused to comply with the prisoners more radical demands, such as the removal of the Detention Center’s doctor and warden. Concerns over medical treatment, visiting hours, and employment also remained. Ultimately, prisoners staged two additional sit-ins at the detention center in July and August of 1973.<sup>65</sup>

## Theme 7: Labor

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Donna Murch, *Living for the City: Migration, Education, and the Rise of the Black Panther Party in Oakland, California*, (Chapel Hill, UNC Press, 2010), 187-189.

<sup>64</sup> “D.C. Jail Inmates Hold 9 Guards and Hardy,” *Evening Star*, October 11, 1972. “Hardy Sure He’d Be Slain in D.C. Jail,” *Washington Post*, Oct 14, 1972. “D.C. Jail Rebellion: Reprisals Against Prisoners Reported,” *Washington Area Spark*, Vol. 2, No. 3 (Oct 31, 1972), 11.

<sup>65</sup> “25 Hour Sit-In Ended by D.C. Women Inmates,” *Washington Post*, Apr 20, 1973. “Women in D.C. Detention Center Hold Sit-In,” *Washington Post*, Apr 19, 1973. “Women Strike Over Conditions at Detention Center,” *Washington Area Spark*, Vol. 2, No. 10, May 15-June 12, 1973. “Sit-In Halted at Women’s Jail Center,” *Washington Post*, July 25, 1973. “Women at Detention Center Hold Sit-in Over Grievances,” *Washington Post*, Aug 14, 1973.



Washington D.C. is not known as a center of labor organizing. With its huge white collar workforce, relatively meager industrial sector, and tight color line in the service industries, labor organizers struggled to make headway in the city for most of the 20th century. It is unsurprising, then, that the vast majority of Black Power organizing in the city during the 1960s and 70s occurred outside of the House of Labor. Nevertheless, the city's Black Power activists were keenly aware of the critical role that labor-force discrimination played in African American oppression and did their best to address it. Yet without the culture of labor organizing that characterized cities like Detroit or New York, these activists made little headway.

The first major Black Power effort to address discrimination targeted small businesses and the building trades. In the aftermath of the April 1968 revolt, George Storey, an Ohio native and chemist, gathered financial backing from merchants and residents of the upper 14th Street corridor to create Build Black, an organization dedicated to making sure that the area was not rebuilt by the "honkie unions" that excluded African Americans or that the same white proprietors return to dominate the area's small businesses. Working out of a dilapidated storefront on 14th Street, Storey called instead for the "formation of business organizations, unions, cooperatives and individuals proprietorships in which black people have substantial economic interest and the black community has substantial voice." Build Black was small; it only had nine members in May 1968. Yet it attracted a large audience with its Friday night "rap sessions," drawing well over 100 people in April and May 1968. In its first action, it staged a picket outside of the P and G Market, protesting what it argued were exorbitant prices. The owner closed the store in response. Despite this early activity, the organization appears quickly to have declined. Residents who contacted the group for help starting businesses in the fall of 1968 never received call backs. Early in 1969, Build Black appears to have been absorbed into the Committee for Rebuilding Upper Cardozo, which hastily created urban renewal plans for upper 14th Street in order to make sure that Walter Fauntroy's Model Inner City Community Organization - which organizers viewed as middle class interlopers - did not move into the area.<sup>66</sup>

In the years after 1968, Black Power labor organizers shifted their sights to the city's largest industry: the federal government. Though president Harry Truman had ordered the federal bureaucracy desegregated in 1948, by the early 1970s African Americans remained clustered in the lowest rungs of government employment and faced widespread discrimination in accessing the services available to federal workers. Backed by local Black Power activists, many federal workers sought to remedy this situation by organizing a series of agency based "task forces."

The first such task force, Government Employees United Against Racial Discrimination (GUARD) was a confederation of federal agency-based groups created by the Washington Urban League in 1970 to protest discrimination in hiring and promotion. After organizing in more than a dozen federal agencies, including the Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW) departments, the National Institutes of Health (NIH), and the U.S. Postal Service, the group branched out to organize District government sanitation and fire department employees in the mid-1970s. When federal workers began organizing, GUARD co-chairman Arthur Parks, a biology lab technician at the NIH, recalled, many black federal workers were "suffocating in thankless, low-paying, dead end jobs, without any real prospects of

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<sup>66</sup> "Shouting Flares at Cardozo Meeting on Riot Responsibility," *Evening Star*, Apr 13, 1968. "Negro Role in Building Urged," *Washington Post*, May 6, 1968. "Ten Arrested To End UPO Center Sit-In," *Washington Post*, Feb 15, 1969.

meaningful advancement." Determined to change their circumstances, Parks and other GUARD organizers used lawsuits, the grievance process, pickets and other disruptive direct action tactics to pursue their agenda. For instance, in 1970 GUARD staged a series of disruptive protests and sit-ins at HUD, including pursuing a fleeing Director George Romney down ten flights of stairs as he tried to sneak past them, that led to an investigation by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) and the promotion of dozens of black workers. Outside of the workplace, GUARD also allied with D.C. Black Power organizations to protest a range of issues including U.S. trade with Rhodesia and police brutality. One such organization with which it collaborated was the other major task force of black federal workers, United Blacks Against Discrimination, or UBAD.

UBAD was a black employee organization based at Walter Reed Army Medical Center which claimed to represent the medical center's 1,700 black civilian employees. Formed in early 1972, UBAD, staged several high-profile protests against discrimination in hiring, promotion, discipline, and lending at the base's credit union. The medical center leadership confirmed the employees' allegations of discrimination, noting, for instance, that 88 percent of black employees worked in low level positions (defined as GS-6 or below), and assured them that the Army was working to address the issue. Yet after six months of protests, UBAD felt that the medical center leadership had not done enough and called a mass meeting attended by Julius Hobson. When Non-Voting Delegate Walter Fauntroy tried to address the employees later that day, he was denied a space on campus, moving him to stage a four hour sit-in outside the post commander's office. As a result of the protest, Fauntroy was allowed to return to the campus on May 9 and hold a meeting where 1,000 black employees told their stories of working conditions at the center. Despite this victory, within six months, one hundred kitchen workers alleged widespread bias in their department and issued a list of 33 demands to their director. Nine months later, in October 1973, UBAD members triggered an FBI investigation of the Walter Reed Credit Union after they alleged that white Board members had discriminated against black members in making loans and tried to discourage blacks from voting in Board elections. The organization dropped out of the news after the trials resulting from the credit union investigation.<sup>67</sup>

## **Theme 8: Pan-Africanism<sup>68</sup>**

The nation's capital is an international city. Home to dozens of embassies and the State Department, it is the heart of the national foreign policy apparatus and the domestic touch point for most foreign countries in the United States. In the early 1970s, Black Power organizers capitalized on the city's status to make it an epicenter of anti-colonial activism.

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<sup>67</sup> "Walter Reed Blacks Launch Bias Fight," *Washington Post*, Jan 14, 1972. "Fauntroy Sits at Walter Reed, Wins Meeting with Blacks," *Washington Post*, May 6, 1972. "100 Demand 'End to Bias' At Hospital," *Washington Post*, Jan 30, 1973. "Walter Reed Credit Union Seen Biased: Racial Bias Charged at Credit Unit," *Washington Post*, Oct 5, 1973. "Army Credit Union Probed For Kickbacks by Blacks" *Jet Magazine*, Nov 1, 1973. "Paytience P. Jones Obituary," *Washington Post*, Feb 3, 2013.

<sup>68</sup> Portions of this section are from George Derek Musgrove, "50 years ago, D.C.'s first African Liberation Day launched a movement," *Washington Post*, May 28, 2022.

Africa loomed large in the imagination of many of the city's Black Power activists during the 1960s. D.C. African Americans bought African clothing at nearly a half dozen local boutiques. Others sought to mimic what they imagined as African cultural practices like the Nguzo Saba or celebrations like Kwanza (both created by African American Ron Karenga in the mid-1960s). Many implicitly admitted their estrangement from Africa by demanding that the D.C. School system offer courses in Swahili. And still others gravitated toward the embassies of newly independent African nations to hear news from the continent or meet people of African descent - the percentage of the black population in the United States that was born in Africa in 1968 was miniscule. Though a choice few activists had traveled to revolutionary hot spots in Africa and the diaspora, few had sought to create direct organizational ties between the black freedom struggle in the United States and anti-colonial movements abroad.

That all changed in 1971. That year, the Nixon Administration and its allies in Congress moved to violate United Nations sanctions and import chrome from the brutal white minority regime in Rhodesia. The administration also decided to continue providing military aid to Portugal, which was desperately fighting to hang onto its colonies in Mozambique, Angola and Guinea-Bissau. These moves outraged Owusu Sadaukai (née Howard Fuller), a lithe, intense Black Power activist and founder of Malcolm X University in Durham, North Carolina. Sadaukai had recently visited anticolonial rebels in Mozambique, who told him that African Americans could assist in their struggle by protesting U.S. government support for colonialism and sending money and material aid. In early 1972, Sadaukai, joined by Cleveland Sellers, Florence Tate, and other experienced young Black Power organizers, endeavored to do just that, forming the African Liberation Day Coordinating Committee and setting up a headquarters at 2207 14<sup>th</sup> Street NW, just north of W Street. From this storefront, they planned an international demonstration for the last Saturday in May of 1972.



African Liberation Day marchers leave Malcolm X Park and head south on 16th St., then west on Florida Ave. toward Embassy Row, May 27, 1972. Reprinted with permission of the DC Public Library, Star Collection © Washington Post.

Black Washingtonians responded enthusiastically. School board chairman Marion Barry led the local steering committee, and the Blackman's Volunteer Army of Liberation promised to serve as marshals. On May 27, Between 10,000 and 25,000 people marched from Malcolm X Park to protest in front of the Portuguese Embassy (on Tracy Place in Sheridan/Kalorama), the Rhodesian Information Center, the South Africa Embassy (on Massachusetts Avenue) and the U.S. State Department, before ending in a huge rally at the Sylvan Theater on the grounds of the Washington Monument's. (Another 30,000 attended events in San Francisco, Toronto, Dominica, Antigua and Grenada.)<sup>69</sup>

Following the remarkable success of African Liberation Day, many of the young veterans of the Students Nonviolent Coordinating Committee commenced their own organizing projects on Africa. Just up 14th Street from the offices of the ALDCC, in the Center for Black Education,

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<sup>69</sup> Richard Prince, "12,000 Blacks March to Support Africa: Blacks Hold March for Solidarity," *Washington Post*, May 28, 1972. "Blacks Mobilize for African Liberation," *Washington Post*, Apr 1, 1972. "Heartfelt Outpouring for Mandela; Anti-Apartheid Activists, Public Energized by Today's Visit," *Washington Post*, June 24, 1990. Woodard, *A Nation Within a Nation*, 175-178. Rickford, *We Are an African People*, 185.

Geri Stark, Sylvia Hill, Jimmy Garrett, Judy Claude, Edie Wilson, Marvin Holloway, Kathy Flewellen, and Courtland Cox were planning the Sixth Pan-African Congress for much of 1972. The meeting took place June 19-27, 1974, in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania and is described above in the section on the SNCC. Also busy on his own project was Stokely Carmichael. After leaving the United States for Guinea in 1969, Carmichael began working with Kwame Nkrumah, the deposed former president of Ghana. Nkrumah enlisted Carmichael in building the U.S. branch of his proposed All-African People's Revolutionary Party, a Pan-Africanist political party that Nkrumah hoped could free not simply the continent but blacks in the diaspora as well. Carmichael eagerly signed on, cryptically announcing the creation of the organization during an October 17, 1972 address in Howard University's Crampton Auditorium. Before he left the District for what would become a three-week speaking and organizing tour, Ture assembled a group of activists who would serve as a core of the organization in Washington, D.C.<sup>70</sup>

Though these other projects began to occupy the interest of some organizers, many of the organizers of African Liberation Day Coordinating Committee remained focused on African Liberation Day. Capitalizing on their success in 1972, members of the ALDCC transformed their organization into a permanent African Liberation Support Committee and committed themselves to establishing coordinating committees in cities across America that could host African Liberation Day annually. In 1973, they staged another D.C. rally, this time as a local event, with a crowd of 4,500 braving cool, wet weather to raise \$40,000 for African freedom fighters. Organizers staged smaller protests in 20 other cities across the United States.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> "Carmichael Says Politics 'Not Answer'," *Washington Post*, Oct 18, 1972. "Absence Saps D.C. Influence," *Washington Post*, Nov 23, 1972. "Carmichael pushes pan-Africanism," *Baltimore Sun*, Nov 12, 1974. "A Great Day for Rallies," *Washington Post*, May 29, 1977. "Sometimes, You Must Join 'Em To Beat 'Em," *Washington Post*, June 1, 1983. Joseph, *Waitin til the Midnight Hour*, 220, 289-290. Bob Brown, phone interview with the author, January 3, 2020.

<sup>71</sup> "2nd African Liberation Day, Demonstrations Set May 26," *Washington Post*, Mar 6, 1973. "Rallies Support Africans: Domination Of Blacks by Whites Scored," *Washington Post*, May 27, 1973. "African Liberation Day D.C. Set on May 25," *Afro-American*, May 11, 1974.



Members of the All-African People's Revolutionary Party march outside the White House for African Liberation Day, May 28, 1977. Reprinted with permission of the D.C. Public Library, Star Collection © Washington Post.

Though successful, the broad coalition that staged African Liberation Day in 1972 and 1973 was fragile. Operating as a black united front, it encompassed nearly every political persuasion in the African American community, from the revolutionary Black Panther Party to the white-gloved Alpha Kappa Alpha sorority. Almost immediately, the members of the coalition began to fracture over strategy. First to break from the group were the liberal reformers, many of whom believed they could better achieve their goals working through corporate America and the Democratic Party. Then some of the principal organizers, including Sadaukai, rejected the united front strategy favored by Black nationalists and adopted Marxism-Leninism. As a result, between 1974 and 1977, D. C. African Liberation Day became a cacophony of sectarian debate. At the “Which Road to Black Liberation?” conference at Howard University that preceded the 1974 rally, organizers argued over the “correct” way to wage the Black freedom struggle at home and abroad. In 1975 the event was staged by the now interracial and Marxist-Leninist African

Liberation Support Committee, while in 1976 the Pan-African and all-black All-African People's Revolutionary Party helmed the event. In 1977, multiple factions held competing events. That year, Kwame Ture rallied members of his A-APRP at the southern end of Malcolm X Park, while members of the ALSC gathered at the northern end. The African Liberation Support Coalition, a splinter group led by Chicago activist Abdul Alkalimat (née Gerald McWhorter), rallied a half-mile away in Kalorama Park. All three denounced the others, with Ture calling the organizers of the competing rallies "political amateurs" and Alkalimat dismissing the A-APRP leader as a "narrow" nationalist.<sup>72</sup> With its dedicated local activists and strong international network, the A-APRP gained control of D.C. African Liberation Day in 1978 and maintained it through the event's end in 1991.<sup>73</sup>

While the nationalists and Marxists were fighting over control of African Liberation Day, many more moderate Black Power activists were building their own organizations. In 1975 several members of the Congressional Black Caucus and a number of black academics and congressional staff specializing in Africa created the Black Forum on Foreign Policy to coordinate African American lobbying and public information on U.S. foreign policy concerning Africa. The group developed a broad network of black foreign policy specialists and began to take public positions on U.S. foreign policy. In 1976 the Black Forum on Foreign Policy hosted a Leadership Conference, its only major event. The historian Ben Talton has noted that "Leaders from the NAACP, PUSH, Africare, the Black Economic Research Council and the National Council of Negro Women gathered for a weekend to strategize." The gathering issued a statement that focused on Congress of Racial Equality head Roy Innis' then ongoing efforts to recruit African American mercenaries to fight alongside the U.S. backed UNITA rebel faction in Angola. The group denounced the effort as "divide and rule tactics that set Blacks against Blacks." But the most important product of the conference was some participants' call for an 'outside' pressure group that could complement the Congressional Black Caucus' efforts 'inside' Congress, concerning Africa. Rep. Charles Diggs (D-MI) and his staffer Randall Robinson would work through 1977 to build just such an organization. In the spring of 1978, they opened the D.C. office of TransAfrica, a lobbying organization dedicated to amplifying African American voices in U.S. foreign policy debates, under Executive Director Randall Robinson. The group's first policy initiative was to push the Carter Administration to take a stronger stand against white minority rule in South Africa and Rhodesia, which it did.<sup>74</sup> Yet TransAfrica's most

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<sup>72</sup> "A Great Day for Rallies," *Washington Post*, May 29, 1977. "African Liberation Draws Thousands to Nation's Capital," *Bay State Banner*, June 2, 1977. "African Liberation Day Scheduled," *Bay State Banner*, May 4, 1978. Amiri Baraka to Richard Gibson, June 1, 1977, Richard T. Gibson Papers MS 2302 Series 1, Box 12, Folder 4: Correspondence with Amiri Baraka.

<sup>73</sup> "Africa is the Focus for Washington Rallies," *Bay State Banner*, May 10, 1979. "African Liberation Day draws over 1500 to D.C." *Bay State Banner*, May 31, 1979. "Photo Standalone 1," *Washington Post*, May 25, 1980. "Around the Globe," *Washington Informer*, May 15, 1980. "African Liberation Day Nears," *Washington Post*, May 21, 1981. "3,000 Marchers Celebrate African Liberation Day," *Washington Post*, May 24, 1981. "Parades and Picnics Draw Stay-in-Towners," *Washington Post*, May 29, 1983. "Town and Around," *Washington Informer*, June 1, 1983. "700 Celebrate African Liberation Day," *Washington Post*, May 27, 1984. "Freedom Rally Held: Apartheid Protested at Event For African Liberation Day," *Washington Post*, May 26, 1985. "African Liberation Day—No Picnic," *Afro-American*, June 7, 1986. "Celebration of African Unity," *Washington Post*, May 27, 1990.

<sup>74</sup> "New Lobby of Blacks Will Seek to Influence U.S. Policy in Africa," *Washington Post*, Apr 22, 1978. "A Black Political Group Set Up as Africa Lobby," *Washington Post*, May 21, 1978. Ronald Williams II, *A Black Embassy: TransAfrica and the Struggle for Foreign Policy Justice*, forthcoming from UNC Press.

important campaigns took place in the 1980s and 90s and are discussed below in a concluding section on Black Power resurgence.

As liberal veterans of the Black Power movement were getting organized on Capitol Hill, a small group of radicals, many of them women and veterans of the Sixth Pan-African Congress, were creating their own organizations for the purpose of continuing the campaign to end colonialism and white minority rule in southern Africa. In 1975, this group formed the Southern Africa News Collective to better inform D.C. African Americans about the ongoing struggle in southern Africa. The group gathered weekly to decide on who would write articles for their newsletter and then the group edited the submissions. They distributed the newsletter to local church, community, and activist groups. In 1978, the collective moved beyond information sharing to activism when it morphed into the Southern Africa Support Project. The Southern Africa Support Project was a local organizing and fundraising group. It conducted public information events about white minority rule in Namibia, Zimbabwe, and South Africa and the destabilizing effects of these governments on the independent “frontline states” of Mozambique, Angola, Zambia, Botswana, and Tanzania. To educate the D.C. community about events in these countries, it organized “Southern Africa Week” where it staged public lectures, films and other educational events starting in 1978. Each year the week was named after a country, so, for instance, in 1980 the group held Zimbabwe Week, and in 1981, Namibia Week. During these weeks, SASP also held radiothons (on WHUR and WPFW), danceathons (sometimes featuring Go-Go bands Rare Essence and Junkyard Band), and races to raise money and collect supplies for the frontline states and insurgent groups like the African National Congress. Often the group held their fundraisers at Freedom Plaza to gain maximum visibility, and members of the D.C. Council would stop by to make statements of solidarity. In 1986, for instance, the group collected \$6,000 for medical supplies for women and children in the South West African People’s Organization camps in Angola. “In essence,” Chairwoman Sylvia Hill recalls of these events, “our strategy was to center the struggle in the mainstream of black political life.” The group was never large - it had about twenty core members at its height and members often met around each other’s kitchen tables – but it was packed with seasoned activists. It also worked with other groups to expand its reach. SASP organizers collaborated with members of the D.C. Council to secure D.C. divestment from South Africa, helped TransAfrica stage a year-long picket outside the South African Embassy in 1985, and worked with members of the Congressional Black Caucus to pass sanctions legislation in Congress. The group operated through 1991, when Nelson Mandela traveled to the United States. By this time, it had raised \$200,000 for southern African freedom struggles over the course of thirteen years.<sup>75</sup>

## **Theme 9: The Movement Becomes the Government**

By the late 1970s, Black Power activists had joined the same power structure that they had railed against. Many transformed their War on Poverty programs into Community Development Corporations, businesses, foundations, and consulting firms. Organizers Marion Barry, Douglas Moore, Julius Hobson, Willie Hardy, Nadine Winter, Sterling Tucker, and John Wilson all

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<sup>75</sup> "Heartfelt Outpouring for Mandela; Anti-Apartheid Activists, Public Energized by Today's Visit," *Washington Post*, June 24, 1990. Maize Woodford, "Glossary of Organizations," *The Black Scholar*, Vol. 36, No. 1, Spring 2006, 63-69. Sylvia Hill interview by William Minter, Washington, D.C., Aug 12, 2004, at [http://www.nocasyvictories.org/interviews/int16\\_hill.php](http://www.nocasyvictories.org/interviews/int16_hill.php). *Southern African News*, Vol 1., No. 5, Feb/ March 1980.



leveraged their activist credentials to gain seats on the D.C. Council. In 1978, Barry (with SNCC veteran Ivanhoe Donaldson serving as his campaign manager) achieved the remarkable feat of becoming the first former Black Power activist elected to a big city mayorship.<sup>76</sup> Anti-poverty activist and former Black United Front leader Willie J. Hardy reflected the thinking of many of these Black Power organizers when, remarking on her election to the D.C. Council in 1974: "the ones who make laws are the ones who bring about change. That's where the power is."<sup>77</sup>



Marion Barry is sworn in as Mayor by Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall, January 2, 1979. Reprinted with permission of the DC Public Library, Star Collection © Washington Post.

Once in power, Barry accelerated the pace of institutionalization. His administration brought scores of former organizers from SNCC, Pride, Inc., Center for Black Education, and other groups into city government. (In an effort to mollify protesters, in the mid-1980s Barry often brought *them* into government too, causing his former SNCC comrade, Councilman John Wilson, to gripe, "We hire everybody that complains about the city. There are no independent advocacy groups in this city.") The growth of the Congressional Black Caucus and related organizations like the National Black Leadership Roundtable and TransAfrica performed a

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<sup>76</sup> Asch and Musgrove, *Chocolate City*, 390-424.

<sup>77</sup> Yvonne Shinhoster Lamb, "Willie J. Hardy; Activist, 2-Term Council Member," *Washington Post*, Aug 23, 2007.

similar function for national political circles, giving African Americans a foothold on Capitol Hill and in the non-profit lobbying community. These groups also came to define much of the city's social and cultural life, staging elaborate fundraising dinners, sponsoring the Martin Luther King, Jr. Day Parade (the first in the nation on King's actual birthday), and continuing to facilitate African Liberation Day and Malcolm X Day as annual District cultural and political events.<sup>78</sup>

The changes to Malcolm X Day showed the dramatic success of institutionalization in the late 1970s. Begun by street organizers Charles Stephenson, Malik Edwards and Sherry Brown in May 1972, the event remained itinerant (securing small venues in different parts of Wards 7 and 8) and relatively small (1,000 people attended in 1975) for its first few years. Yet when city and federal authorities cut off funding for Human Kindness Day in 1975, the organizers of Malcolm X Day determined to bring the energy, and, just as importantly, huge crowds, from that event on the National Mall to their event east of the Anacostia River. They received robust city support for their efforts. While Malcolm X Day organizers in other black controlled cities remained small outfits bereft of municipal sponsorship, the D.C. Malcolm X Day committee received robust support from the city government under Mayor Marion Barry. By the late 1970s the gathering had become so large that organizers had to stage it at Anacostia Park, where it would remain until 1995 when the organizers moved on to other pursuits. As a large cultural event, Malcolm X Day became a proving ground for local artists, and many of the city's Go-Go bands—Experience Unlimited, Chuck Brown, Junkyard Band, and Rare Essence, among others—performed alongside more famous national acts. Yet the organizers remained true to the event's purpose, drawing large crowds together with black culture then giving them a political message. Thus, in between the musical acts, speakers like sponsor Calvin Rolark of the Black United Fund, Rep. Eleanor Holmes Norton, Dick Gregory, Betty Shabazz, Jesse Jackson and Kwame Ture addressed the crowd about issues such as drug abuse, D.C. self-determination, and ending apartheid in South Africa. The D.C. Malcolm X Day was both the largest and longest running celebration of the slain Muslim minister in the country.<sup>79</sup>

In becoming part of the power structure, many activists turned away from talk of revolution and focused their attention on proportional representation, power sharing, and multiculturalism. The city's several black independent schools, for instance, began deemphasizing anti-imperialism in their curricula and focusing on what would later be called

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<sup>78</sup> "Martin Luther King Birthday Features Memorials, Parade," *Washington Post*, Jan 15, 1979. "D.C. Celebrates King Birthday," *Evening Star*, Jan 16, 1980. "Stevie Wonder Helps Lure 10,000 for King Memorial," *Baltimore Afro-American*, Jan 26, 1980. "1,000 Gather to Honor Malcolm X," *Washington Post*, May 19, 1975. "Malcolm X Day Activities Postponed Due To Rain," *Washington Informer*, Jun 1, 1983. "Festival Attracts 6,000," *Washington Informer*, Jun 8, 1983. Voice of Malcolm X Resounding in Song, Speeches and Celebrations, *Washington Post*, May 20, 1989. "Home-Grown Acts Going to the Go-Go," *Washington Post*, Aug 9, 1991. "Group to Celebrate National Malcolm X Day in Washington," *Amsterdam News*, May 2, 1992. "Black Caucus Dinner Draws Full House," *Washington Daily News*, June 19, 1971. "At 40, the CBC Marks a Milestone" *Roll Call*, Mar 29, 2011. "Open Letter to Reagan," *Amsterdam News*, Sep 21, 1985. "Some Senators Won Because Of Blacks, NBLR Members Say," *Washington Informer*, Nov 19, 1986.

<sup>79</sup> "1,000 Gather to Honor Malcolm X," *Washington Post*, May 19, 1975. "Malcolm X Day Activities Postponed Due To Rain," *Washington Informer*, Jun 1, 1983. "Festival Attracts 6,000," *Washington Informer*, Jun 8, 1983. Voice of Malcolm X Resounding in Song, Speeches and Celebrations, *Washington Post*, May 20, 1989. "Vantage Point: 1990—The Year of Malcolm X," *Michigan Citizen*, May 20, 1989. "Home-Grown Acts Going to the Go-Go," *Washington Post*, Aug 9, 1991. "Spike Lee's Malcolm X is Timely," *The Skanner*, May 6, 1992. "Group to Celebrate National Malcolm X Day in Washington," *Amsterdam News*, May 2, 1992. <http://malcolmxday.org/index.php/history>.

Afrocentrism.<sup>80</sup> Granted, a left flank of Marxists and Pan-Africanists continued to organize around the fight against colonialism in southern Africa in these years, but their calls for fundamental change focused primarily on far away countries, not on the nation's capital.

Not until the social crisis of the crack epidemic and a new round of national protest campaigns reinvigorated local organizing in the mid-1980s did radical street activists again come to the fore of D.C. Black Power politics.

## **Conclusion: The Black Power Resurgence**

Entering the 1980s, the D.C. African American community was devastated by recession and a national conservative retrenchment. While more African Americans had made their way into the middle class and the halls of the District Building, many others found the doors of opportunity slamming shut. By 1979, the stagflation of the late Carter Administration years had pushed District unemployment to approximately 7.5%. That was just the average. The Urban League noted that unemployment was as high as 25% in low income, predominantly African American neighborhoods. Then came the election of right-winger Ronald Reagan, who slashed federal social service and job training programs. By 1982, the zenith of the downturn, the city's jobless rate had jumped to 10.5% and black youth unemployment had reached 50%. One resident lamented, "You're either a big-time lawyer or a doctor in this town, or you're looking for a job, unemployed."<sup>81</sup>

While the successes of desegregation and electoral incorporation in the late 1970s buoyed African Americans' faith that they could work within the system, the rise of the Reagan coalition pushed many back toward nationalism, Marxism, and protest. Not only did Reagan seem immune to African American suffering during the recession, he promised a forceful rollback of civil rights and Black Power movement victories. He became the first major party presidential candidate since World War II to oppose any increase in D.C. self-determination when he rejected the D.C. Voting Rights Amendment, which would have treated the District as though it were a state "for purposes of representation in the Congress." And in the realm of foreign policy, he pivoted away from former President Carter's emphasis on human rights and aligned the United States with the white settler regime in South Africa and their regional allies, an issue of particular concern to local activists.<sup>82</sup>

Alarmed by these developments, Non-Voting D.C. Delegate Walter Fauntroy began working with national black leadership to reinvigorate black activist networks. Leveraging the new institutions created in the late 1970s, such as the D.C.-based National Black Leadership Roundtable, they pressed Congress to adopt the Congressional Black Caucus's progressive "alternative budget" and to declare Martin Luther King, Jr.'s birthday a national holiday. In 1983, they staged a 20th anniversary of the March on Washington to mobilize the national black community around an agenda of "peace, jobs and freedom" heading into the presidential election. And in 1984, activists from the D.C.-based TransAfrica and Southern Africa Support Project

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<sup>80</sup> Rickford, *We Are an African People*, 219-268.

<sup>81</sup> "Frustration Hides Behind Unemployment Statistics" *Washington Post*, Apr 3, 1979. "For Many District Voters, the Only Issue Is Jobs," *Washington Post*, Jul 8, 1982.

<sup>82</sup> "Hawaii is Ninth to Ratify D.C. Voting Amendment." *Washington Post*, Apr 19, 1980. James Meriwether, *Tears, Fire, and Blood: The United States and the Decolonization of Africa* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2021), 206-236.

initiated anti-apartheid protests outside the South African Embassy. Thousands were arrested in what became the longest civil disobedience campaign since the Montgomery Bus Boycott, forcing Congress to pass divestment legislation.<sup>83</sup>

The resurgence also had tangible effects on the streets of local D.C. During the 1980s and early 1990s, black bookstores flourished, with Hodari Ali's Pyramid Books growing into a regional chain. Black art galleries sprouted in nearly every downtown neighborhood. Late in the decade, Howard University students founded the nationalist Black Nia FORCE and took over the Administration Building to protest President James Cheek's close relationship with the Reagan and Bush administrations. And in the 1994 election, former University of the District of Columbia student leader Mark Thompson's all-black Umoja Party amassed enough votes to gain official recognition as a "major party" in D.C. elections.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> "Open Letter to Reagan, *Amsterdam News*, Sep 21, 1985. "Some Senators Won Because of Blacks, NBLR Members Say," *Washington Informer*, Nov 19, 1986. "The Roundtable Returns!" *Washington Informer*, Sep 24, 1997. Walter E. Fauntroy papers, Special Collections Research Center, The George Washington University, Box 422, Folder 3, "National Black Leadership Roundtable 1984 Voter Registration Get Out the Vote National Drive and Optional National Tours." Walter E. Fauntroy papers, Special Collections Research Center, The George Washington University, Box 155, undated folder, "A Call for a Black Leadership Conference on the Unity, Survival, and Progress of Black America." Manning Marable, *Black American Politics* (1985), 108-124. "1960s Tactics Revived for Embassy Sit-ins," *Washington Post*, Nov 29, 1984. "On Mandela Day, D.C. founders of Free South Africa Movement Look Back," *Washington Post*, July 17, 2013.

<sup>84</sup> "A New Chapter Begins for Pyramid Bookstore: Shop Specializing in Books by and for Blacks Opens Its 1st Prince George's Location," *Washington Post*, Jan 16, 1990. "Pyramid Books: One and Only Black-Owned Bookstore," *NPR's All Things Considered*, Jan 21, 1991. "Black History Spelling Bee Planned," *Washington Informer*, Feb 23, 1983. "New Bookstore Fills Void," *Washington Post*, Dec 10, 1981. "Karibu Books Closes Due to Internal Problems," *Afro-American Red Star*, Feb 2, 2008. Joshua Myers, *We Are Worth Fighting For* (New York: NYU Press, 2019), 75-207. "Protest Brings Changes at Lorton," *Washington Post*, Apr 13, 1995. "Umoja Party Stirs Up D.C. Political Scene," *Washington Post*, Nov 4, 1996. "Umoja Party Remains on the Outside," *Washington Post*, Nov 14, 1996. "Thompson Is Urged to Quit Council Race," *Washington Post*, Oct 23, 1998. "Umoja Party Needs Turnout to Survive," *Washington Post*, Oct 12, 2000.



Mayor Marion Barry addresses the crowd at the Million Man March.  
Reprinted with permission from C-Span.

Seeing the nationalist ferment in the District, Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan decided to use the city as a stage in his bid to become the country's preeminent black leader. In 1989, as the city was reeling from its newly gained status as the “murder capital” of the U.S., Farrakhan held a massive anti-violence rally at the D.C. Armory. (At the rally Farrakhan lauded the “Dope Busters,” members of Mosque #4 who had battled drug dealers in the Mayfair Mansions apartment complex. The un-armed Muslims chased away the drug dealers, creating a business model that the Nation of Islam used to secure multi-million dollar security contracts with several different cities in the years ahead.) The following year, the NOI made its first foray into electoral politics, running candidates for office in the District and in Prince George's County, Maryland. And in 1995, the Nation hosted the largest mass protest of African Americans in the history of the country, the Million Man March, on the National Mall. For D.C. locals, Farrakhan's gathering of black men to atone for their failures to be husbands, fathers and brothers, resembled another event held annually on the National Mall since 1986, the National Council of Negro Women's Black Family Reunion. Organizer Dorothy Height had long hoped that her event would challenge African Americans to again embrace the "family values" that had sustained them through centuries of oppression. When Farrakhan gathered between 600,000 and

one million men at the west front of the Capitol on October 16, he repeated an appeal that Height and other black women had been making in the city for nearly a decade.<sup>85</sup>

D.C. activists were critical to the march's success. Rev. Image Stewart, who ran a women's shelter in Northeast, served on the march's steering committee; Chief of Staff to D.C. Delegate Fauntroy, Donna Brazile, labored as an unofficial liaison to Congress; and Rev. Willie Wilson of Union Temple Baptist Church, Bishop George Stallings of Imani Temple, Mayor Barry, his wife Cora and son Christopher, D.C. Shadow Senator Jesse Jackson, Dorothy Height, lawyer Faye Haskins, and radio talk show host Mark Thompson all addressed the crowd on October 16.<sup>86</sup>

Though the Million Man March was the high point of the Black Power resurgence in the District (and nationally), the energy that propelled so many men to the National Mall in 1995 quickly dissipated as residents continued to struggle with the city's bankruptcy, dysfunctional bureaucracy, and the nation's highest murder rate.

In April 1998, more than 1,000 activists, elected officials, friends and admirers gathered at the Marriott Wardman Park in Northwest to honor the terminally ill Kwame Ture (formerly Stokely Carmichael), who had returned to the United States for medical treatment from his home in Conakry, Guinea. A remarkable cast of local and national Black Power activists turned out for the occasion: SNCC, Black United Front, and All-African Peoples' Revolutionary Party comrades, along with Louis Farrakhan, Amiri Baraka, and much of the city's elected leadership. SNCC veterans Judy Richardson and Bill Hall served as MCs. It was a fitting coda to the movement that had transformed the nation's capital.

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<sup>85</sup> "Drug Patrols Improve Image of Muslims," *Washington Post*, Sep 18, 1988. "A Breach in Guards' Invincibility," *Washington Post*, Sep 2, 1996. Blair Ruble, *U Street: A Biography* (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2010), 66-67 and 240. <https://thenationsmosque.org/about>. <https://noicd.org>.

<sup>86</sup> "March of Black Men Is Planned in District; Farrakhan Seeks a Turnout of 1 Million," *Washington Post*, July 19, 1995. "Schools Asked to Back March by Black Men," *Washington Post*, Sep 29, 1995. "Black Men: Turning the Million Man March into 'Responsive Action'" *Washington Informer*, Dec 20, 1995. Steven Lawson, *Running for Freedom* (New York: Wiley-Blackwell, 2015), 289. Donna Brazile, *Cooking with Grease: Stirring the Pots in America* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2004), 195-198.



Mayor Marion Barry and Congressman John Lewis flank their old SNCC comrade at an April 1998 testimonial dinner in his honor at the Marriott Wardman Park Hotel. Image reprinted with permission from C-Span.

The dinner not only marked Ture's last major public appearance in the city, it symbolized the passing of a generation of activists and their style of politics. One year earlier, Congress had stripped the bankrupt city government of nearly all executive and legislative power. Though well ahead of potential opponents in the polls, Mayor Barry, the city's most influential local Black Power activist for a generation, reasoned that the trouble of campaigning would not be worth the hollow prize of a powerless office. Less than a month after the dinner, he announced his decision not to seek reelection. He was succeeded by Anthony Williams, a self-styled "new black leader" who focused less on redistributing resources to the poor and more on management; what he called "real needs and real results." His approach to governing would influence District politics up to the present day. The Black Power era had come to an end in Washington, D.C.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> "Civil Rights Pioneers Honor Kwame Toure in DC," *Jet*, Apr 27, 1998. "The Undying Revolutionary," *Washington Post*, Apr 8 1998.

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# Guide to Determine, Evaluate, and Nominate Historic Black Power Properties

## Introduction

Places significant for association with the history of the Black Power Movement in Washington, D.C. represent a wide range of property types, including row houses and institutional buildings where organizations were housed or meetings were held; churches that offered temporary or permanent space for organizations or specific activities and events; schools where walkouts or organizing occurred; government buildings where protests or convenings took place; and parks and other open spaces where rallies and protests were carried out, most notably the campus of Howard University and Meridian Hill Park, which was informally renamed Malcolm X Park in 1969 as an expression of Black Power and is referred to as such herein. The majority of resources are clustered north of downtown in the neighborhoods of U Street, Columbia Heights, and Shaw.

As with sites related to the 20th Century African American Civil Rights Movement in Washington, D.C., places associated with the D.C.'s Black Power Movement represent a somewhat fragile class of resource. Many important buildings and sites have been or are in danger of being lost to redevelopment, which has especially targeted Northwest neighborhoods east of Rock Creek Park with a historically high percentage of Black residents and businesses, including commercial corridors that were decimated by civil unrest in April 1968. An intense wave of public and private reinvestment in U Street, Columbia Heights, and Shaw began in the 1990s. Given the diminished pool of resources that represent the city's rich Black Power history as well as the declining number of Black residents and Black public officials that were fundamental to the rise of D.C. as a center of the Black Power Movement nationwide, attention should be given both to preserving properties that convey this cultural and political legacy and to the incorporation of this historical context into existing National Register nominations, as recommended below.

## Property Types and Registration Criteria

In keeping with guidelines of the National Park Service and the 20th Century African American Civil Rights Movement in Washington, D.C., the designated property types for sites associated with the D.C. Black Power Movement mostly define their primary relationship to this specific historic context. In this case, property types have not been designated based on architectural styles, periods of construction, or design. In addition, some properties may be classified under more than one of the following property types:

**Strategy centers** are properties that were the site of meetings or that housed organizations or people involved with the D.C. Black Power Movement, for example the headquarters of Youth Pride, Inc. at 1536 U Street NW and the offices of the People's Involvement Corporation at 651 Florida Avenue NW. Churches, organizational headquarters, Black-owned businesses,

community and social service centers, schools, and government buildings may all be understood as strategy centers in accordance with the activities carried out in them. Strategy Centers may be eligible under National Register Criteria A and B for their association with specific events and notable people, or for their function more generally as a site of Black Power activity.

***Demonstration Centers*** are properties that served as the location of parades, protests, rallies, speeches, and/or cultural events that advanced Black Power, for example Malcolm X Park, Howard University's Cramton Auditorium as well as the grounds of the Washington Monument and the Reflecting Pool. Demonstration Centers are most likely to be eligible under National Register Criteria A for their association with significant events.

***Properties Associated with Key Events*** are sites where specific actions associated with the D.C. Black Power Movement took place, but may otherwise be associated with other uses and not have been a repeated sites of Black Power activity, for example Bolling Air Force Base, the site of a housing protest in August 1962, and the Rayburn House Office Building on Capitol Hill, where the Black Power Planning Conference was held in September 1966. Again, properties of this type are most likely to be eligible under National Register Criteria A.

***Historic Districts*** are areas where there is a significant concentration of properties that share historical associations with the D.C. Black Power Movement during the period of significance for this historic context statement (1961–1978). While the National Park Service defines such a district as comprising properties that are "united historically or aesthetically by plan or physical development," the key unifying element here is that the properties share a relationship to people, institutions, or events significant to Black Power; they may not necessarily otherwise share similar physical or architectural characteristics or have been built during the same period. In addition to individual properties, the presence of public spaces in which rallies, demonstrations, or other gatherings took place may help define an area's association with Black Power. While areas such as the campus of Howard University, Malcolm X Park, and sites of major gatherings on and near the National Mall may already be designated as Historic Districts, the existing nominations may be revised to reflect their significance to the Black Power Movement in Washington, D.C. Moreover, many of the key sites associated with Black Power are located within the existing Shaw and Greater U Street Historic Districts, but the periods of significance for which these areas are currently designated end in 1932 and 1948 respectively. The recommendations that conclude this report address this issue.

## **General Registration Requirements**

To be eligible for listing in accordance with this context statement, properties must be located within the boundaries of the District of Columbia; possess historical associations related to the Black Power Movement in Washington, D.C.; attained their significance during the context period of 1966–1978; and retain sufficient physical integrity related to the relevant theme(s) outlined in this study to convey their significance.

In accordance with *National Register Bulletin 15: How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation*, eligible properties must retain integrity of location, setting, materials, design, workmanship, feeling, and/or association. Eligible buildings would ideally continue to have a

recognizable relationship to the urban fabric of the city and their neighborhood. However, the District has undergone intense periods of redevelopment that have largely transformed the historic character and settings of many properties that may be deemed significant for their association with Black Power. While redlining and disinvestment in areas of mostly black residency during the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century may have resulted in "preservation by neglect" for some buildings, the more recent targeting of these areas for redevelopment also led many significant buildings to be partially or fully demolished. Redevelopment has especially targeted areas places where Black Washingtonians were most likely to live, work, shop, and convene during the period of this study. Historic district designations for Greater U Street and Shaw have mitigated some of the loss, and renewed investment has also helped maintain some of these buildings. All of this should be considered in determining whether a property may be eligible for listing despite whether its surroundings have become largely unrecognizable since 1978.

Although properties must be evaluated in accordance with National Register standards, special consideration should be given to understanding the ongoing impacts of segregation and discrimination—specifically barriers to wealth accumulation and financing—when evaluating the integrity of buildings significant for their association with D.C.’s Black Power Movement. Alterations that happened both during and after the period of significance may reflect efforts to affordably maintain the functionality of buildings, at the cost of architectural integrity. This is affirmed by recent scholarship on expanding the criteria for evaluating the historic significance of buildings that may be physically unremarkable or suffer from lack of maintenance.

It is generally expected that common alterations, such as replacement windows and doors within original openings, roof replacement, covering of original siding, removal of or damage to architectural and ornamental elements, and small scale additions will not automatically disqualify a property for listing if its essential external characteristics remain intact. In addition, any alterations, interior or exterior, must be evaluated within the context of the building’s overall ability to convey the association and feeling related to its significance within the historic context established in this study before deeming the building eligible or not due to material or design changes.

Buildings should, in general, be identifiable according to their original architectural style (Bungalow, Tudor Revival, Commercial Brick, International style, etc.) with the understanding that in the case of some resources, stylistic alterations may reflect specific cultural practices of residents or building owners that were employed to make a property their own. Common alterations such as replacement of doors and windows will not generally diminish the historic integrity of a building. More significant changes to buildings, such as removal of character-defining features, additions of incompatible scale, etc. may negatively impact integrity if they occurred after the period of significance. Conversely, substantial alterations undertaken during the period of significance may be relevant to a building's function in the context of the Black Power Movement.

Interiors were not inspected for the survey that accompanies this study, and must not be deemed historically significant in order for a property to be nominated to the DC Inventory or the National Register.

## Amending Existing Nominations

The existing nominations for many designated D.C. historic landmarks and historic districts largely exclude Black history, especially sites and areas associated with the Civil Rights and Black Power movements during the latter half of the 20th century. With this in mind, a survey might be undertaken to identify nominations that should be amended under the cover of this study or the Multiple Property Document for 20th Century African American Civil Rights Sites in Washington, D.C. Historic districts and individual landmarks that have previously been designated based on their architectural and aesthetic distinction may also be eligible for their relationship to D.C.'s Civil Rights and/or Black Power history.

Historic districts comprise multiple buildings in close proximity to one another that share historical and cultural associations, and may include parks or other open space. Because so many sites were concentrated within the area covered by the **Greater U Street Historic District**, this nomination should especially be considered for an extension of its period of significance beyond 1948. This would allow for incorporating the period in which D.C. gained a majority Black population and became a center of the Black Power Movement. The existing nomination concludes with a section on the neighborhood's mid-century decline, which is attributed primarily to desegregation and the outmigration of white and middle class residents, but lacks discussion of redlining or other structural factors. There is only a brief discussion of the 1960s community-led urban renewal project led by Rev. Walter Fauntroy's Model Inner City Community Organization (MICCO) and there is no attention to the many other Black-led enterprises that arose in this area during the Black Power period. This also applies to the **Shaw Historic District** for which the period of significance ends at 1932. In addition, the **16th Street Historic District**, which includes at least six sites associated with Black Power but extends only until 1959; the adjacent **Strivers' Section Historic District**, designated primarily for its association with the rise of D.C.'s early black middle class in 1875–1925; and the **Washington Heights Historic District**, which is immediately west of Strivers' Section, includes the 18th Street commercial corridor in Adams Morgan, and ends at 1950, should all be updated for their association with D.C.'s Black Power Movement.

Similarly, the existing nomination for the **Howard University Historic District** covers only the period 1929–1955, and addresses only the history of three specific buildings. These do not include the Administration Building, which was a central location of student protests in 1968, or Cramton Auditorium, the site of numerous Black Power events. The nomination should be expanded to incorporate the buildings and open spaces that were the site of rallies, speeches, and other important gatherings in 1961–1978. An expansion of the historic district's boundaries beyond the campus itself should also be considered, based on the number of Black Power sites that were in close proximity to the university. The nomination for **Meridian Hill Historic District**, which extends to 1949, should also be amended based on this study's attention to Malcolm X Park as a central locus of Black Power organizing in D.C. (This historic context statement also supplements two other recent NPS studies on the park, the 2019 report "Meridian Hill Park, African American Experiences Since the Civil War: A Special Resource Study," and "Summer in the Parks (1968–1976); A Special Ethnohistory Study," published in 2020.) Finally, the period of significance for the **National Mall Historic District** ends at 1965, three years before the Poor People's Campaign staged events associated with Black Power on the Mall.

Members and supporters of the Black Panther Party also gathered at the Lincoln Memorial in 1970 to announce a constitutional convention and the establishment of a chapter in the District.

Individual historic site nominations for the **Lincoln Memorial**, the **District (John A. Wilson) Building**, and the **Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Library** should all be amended to incorporate both civil rights and Black Power history.

## Appendices

Appendix A consists of a list of sites associated with all of the major Black Power organizations and events that operated or took place in the District between 1961 and 1978. These were originally identified for the purposes of Dr. George Derek Musgrove's comprehensive digital history project Black Power in Washington, D.C., 1961–1998, at <https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/5e17e7d1c4a8406b9eaf26a4eae77103>. These do not *necessarily* qualify for listing in the National Register, but based upon additional research, *may qualify* based on their association with the Black Power Movement in Washington, D.C. For each resource, the listing includes the property's name, address, ward, owner, designation status, a photo, and the property's associated theme. For properties not associated with one of this study's primary themes, explanatory notes are included.

Appendix B consists of list of the same sites in Appendix A, but includes detailed descriptions of the organizations and/or events associated with each of site. Because some sites were the locations for multiple organizations or events (e.g. Howard University's Cramton Auditorium is associated with six separate events), this list is necessarily longer than the site list in Appendix A, but the sites are listed in the same order. Appendix C lists organizations and events for which more research is required.

Appendices D and E consists of two different views of an online interactive map showing all the sites listed in Appendix A, organized by Ward. Overlays show the boundaries of several historic districts named above as significant for their association with the Black Power Movement in Washington, D.C. The map is available at [https://www.google.com/maps/d/edit?mid=1vvVKv9jY9TrY-8apI\\_u-zUstemLMosw&usp=sharing](https://www.google.com/maps/d/edit?mid=1vvVKv9jY9TrY-8apI_u-zUstemLMosw&usp=sharing).