ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation:	COUNTER-CAPITAL: BLACK POWER, THE NEW LEFT, AND THE STRUGGLE TO REMAKE WASHINGTON, D.C. FROM BELOW, 1964-1994 Timothy Daniel Kumfer, Doctor of Philosophy, 2023
Dissertation directed by:	Dr. Christina Hanhardt, Associate Professor, Department of American Studies, University of Maryland College Park

"Counter-Capital: Black Power, the New Left, and the Struggle to Remake Washington, D.C. From Below, 1964-1994" traces how grassroots organizers in the nation's capital fought for greater control over the city and its future between the War on Poverty and rise of neoliberal austerity, helping to shape its recent past and present. Comprising a set of linked case studies, it explores how a generation of activists forged in the crucibles of the Black freedom struggle and resistance to the Vietnam war responded locally to redevelopment schemes, planned inner-city freeways, nascent gentrification, and an exponential rise in homelessness from the late 1960s to the early 1990s. The campaigns they waged brought them into confrontation with federal administrators, legislators, mayors, and even the president. They also led to moments of collaboration with the state, altering the course of urban and social policy locally and nationally and contributing to the growth of community development and direct service approaches. Going beyond the boundaries of policymaking, the radicals it follows fostered emancipatory and

participatory visions for the District and urban life more generally rooted in their movement ideals, ones which remain instructive even as they encountered obstacles to their full realization.

Drawing on a diverse array of archival materials including organizational newsletters, meeting minutes, event flyers, campaign brochures, and correspondence; underground press and community papers alongside mainstream news outlets; documentary film and preserved footage; and oral histories and personal interviews, "Counter-Capital" contributes to debates in the fields of African American, social movement, and urban history. The project is further animated by and participates in discussions taking place across the correlating interdisciplinary fields of African American studies, American studies, and urban studies, bringing aspects of these fields that don't always speak to one another into closer conversation. Laboring at these intersections, it shows how sustained attention to space—and specific places—can reframe the historiography of Black Power and the New Left and how centering activists and their campaigns expands the literature on Washington while troubling conventions in the composite portrait of late 20th C. US cities.

COUNTER-CAPITAL: BLACK POWER, THE NEW LEFT, AND THE STRUGGLE TO REMAKE WASHINGTON, D.C. FROM BELOW, 1964-1994

by

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everyday lives and struggles of District residents offer a powerful example of public scholarship. Each of my committee members has gone above and beyond to support me throughout this process, writing letters of recommendation, providing feedback on fellowship applications, and being available for coffee chats and Zoom calls when I needed help thinking something through.

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List of Abbreviations

ACT	Associated Community Teams
AMO	Adams Morgan Organization
ANC	Advisory Neighborhood Councils / Commissions
BLM	Black Land Movement
CAA	Community Action Agency
CEHC	Capitol East Housing Coalition
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CCNV	Community for Creative Non-Violence
CDC	Community Development Corporation
CHCOP	Columbia Heights Community Ownership Project
CORE	Congress on Racial Equality
CRUST	Community Rehabilitation Under Security and Trust
CURAC	Community Urban Renewal Action Council
CWHC	City Wide Housing Coalition
DCPIRG	Public Interest Research Group, DC Chapter
DCSP	D.C. Statehood Party
DHCD	DC Department of Housing and Community Development
DOD	Department of Defense
DOJ	Department of Justice
ECCO	East Central Citizen's Organization
ECTC	Emergency Committee on the Transportation Crisis
FEMA	Federal Emergency Management Agency

FEW	Federally Employed Women
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation
FHLBB	Federal Home Loan Bank Board
GAO	Government Accountability Office
GSA	General Services Administration
GWU	George Washington University
HUD	Department of Housing and Urban Development
IPS	Institute for Policy Studies
MICCO	Model Inner City Community Organization
MWPHA	Metropolitan Washington Planning and Housing Association
NAACP	National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
NCPC	National Capital Planning Commission
NDC	Neighborhood Development Center
NWRO	National Welfare Rights Organization
OEO	Office of Economic Opportunity
ONE DC	Organizing Neighborhood Equity DC
RAP	Regional Addiction Prevention
RLA	Redevelopment Land Agency
SCLC	Southern Christian Leadership Conference
SNCC	Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee
SPUR	Shaw People's Urban Renewal
UPO	United Planning Organization
USAID	U.S. Agency for International Development

TCP	The Community Partnership for the Prevention of Homelessness
WRDC	Washington Residential Development Coalition
YPNA	Young Pioneers of New Africa

Introduction

On July 10, 2010, over one hundred people streamed into the vacant lot at the corner of 7th and R Streets NW, bypassing the fences and no trespassing signs. Located in Washington, D.C.'s Shaw neighborhood, the historic heart of Black cultural life in the city, the plot of public land known as Parcel 42 had sat empty following the shuttering and demolition of the community health center. The city's promise to develop the site as deeply affordable housing had fallen through, with the Fenty administration citing shifting market conditions following the 2008 financial crisis. Refusing to accept this reversal, area residents and activists decided to take matters into their own hands, liberating the land and reclaiming it as a space for collective use. Starting with a block party, they went on to stake their tents, establishing an occupation that would carry on for two sweltering months. Over the coming weeks, the site served as host to free community meals, film screenings, collective healing sessions, cooperative economics teach-ins, and gardening workshops in addition to providing space for a growing number of unhoused residents.[1]

Convened initially by ONE DC (Organizing Neighborhood Equity), a community organizing group dedicated to centering the leadership of DC's low-income Black residents, the tent city at Parcel 42 not only dramatized the city's racialized displacement crisis, its epicenter in Shaw, and the social cost of policies that prioritized private developers. It also acted as a symbol, however inchoate, of the world that residents wanted to build—one in which housing is a human right, food is freely available to all, and opportunities for education and wellness are more fairly distributed. Linking the decommodification of space to the demand for Black self-determination, a flag hoisted in the middle of the occupation sounded the collective call for "land and liberty."[2]

[1] Jesse Zarley, A Battle for Affordable Housing in DC," Socialist Worker, July 26, 2010, https://socialistworker.org/2010/07/26/affordable-housing-in-dc.
[2] ONE DC, "Press Release for July 10 Site Occupation," *Tent City DC*, July 12, 2010, https://tentcitydc.wordpress.com/2010/07/12/press-release-for-june-10th-site-occupation/.

The seizure of Parcel 42 and the aims that animated it drew on a deeper well of struggle than some of its observers realized. Forty years earlier, Shaw residents and organizers put forward a similar bottoms-up vision for the neighborhood's regeneration—one that contrasted with the federally backed urban renewal plans for the area, which they feared would ultimately underwrite their displacement. The power to prevent such an outcome, they held, could "only come to Black people if they control the land." Coming together as the Black Land Movement, the group devised a set of detailed proposals for fostering Black autonomy that revolved around the creation of cooperatives, collectively owned and managed institutions through which Shaw residents' needs for housing, employment, education, healthcare, recreation, and transit would be met. Taking the first steps towards realizing these wider aspirations, they formed a food buying cooperative, trained youth in carpentry and design alongside teaching them African and African diaspora history, and drew up a comprehensive plan for the area, honing it block by block in resident-centered design charettes. For group members, forging a self-reliant Black community one and a half miles northeast of the White House offered more than a path out from the crises imposed on Shaw by hostile and exploitive outside forces. Claiming the land directly under their feet, they hoped, could be the first step towards an alternative model of urban development that meets the needs of an ascendant Black nation.[3]

"Counter-Capital: Black Power, the New Left, and the Struggle to Remake Washington, D.C. From Below, 1964-1994" chronicles the story of the Black Land Movement and other grassroots groups in the nation's capital, tracing how they fought for greater control over the city and its future between the War on Poverty and rise of neoliberal austerity, helping to shape its recent past and present. Comprising a set of linked case studies, it explores how a generation of

[3] "Why LAND?" *Black Land News*, May 1, 1971, Microfilm P00-22 DN99-1077, Wisconsin Historical Society Library. Former Black Land Movement member Khalid Moussa Foster served as a mentor to ONE DC organizers.

activists forged in the crucibles of the Black freedom struggle and resistance to the Vietnam war responded to redevelopment schemes, planned inner-city freeways, nascent gentrification, and an exponential rise in homelessness from the late 1960s to the early 1990s. The campaigns they waged brought them into confrontation with federal administrators, legislators, mayors, and even the president. They also led to occasional moments of collaboration with the state, altering the course of urban and social policy not only locally but nationally. Going beyond the boundaries of policymaking, the radicals it follows fostered emancipatory and participatory visions for the District of Columbia and urban life more generally rooted in their movement ideals, ones which remain instructive even as they encountered enduring obstacles to their full realization.

Born in rapid succession between 1969-1972, the organizations whose histories it details —the Black Land Movement, the D.C. Statehood Party, the Adams Morgan Organization, and the Community for Creative Non-Violence—spanned the spectrum of Washington's grassroots left social movement landscape. While their on-the-ground actions often confounded neat and clean ideological distinctions, their political orientations corresponded with the currents of Black nationalism, democratic socialism, radical localism, and Christian anarchism, respectively. Some of their memberships were multiracial, others were intentionally Black or predominantly white. Distinct in their strategic approaches and socioeconomic bases, they nevertheless operated within a shared ethos and wrestled with many of the same questions. Resonant across their politics, and running throughout the project's four chapters, are the concepts of *autonomy* and *cooperation*. Whether articulated as self-reliance, self-determination, self-rule, or decentralization, each shared the goal of deepening community control and elevating the power of people to shape their immediate surroundings. Each also understood cooperation as autonomy's enabling condition of possibility, whether cast in the valences of collectivism, coalition, community action, or care.

The sources of these grounding assumptions were numerous, from Third World decolonization and the War on Poverty's call for "maximum feasible participation" to movement experiments in participatory decision-making and the counterculture's quest for personal authenticity. In seeking to expand the realm of freedom, these organizers firmly held, we must first look to ourselves.[4]

Prioritizing independent initiative, the activists it centers confronted the state as a site of strategic dilemma: does the path to greater self-determination pass through the state or evade it entirely? What kinds of policy reforms provide a favorable terrain for collective empowerment and what kinds act to stave them off? When expectations of imminent revolution have faded and reforms do not appear forthcoming, what do you do in the meantime? Washington's grassroots organizers were of course not alone in grappling with these predicaments, which have long haunted the left and which the global upsurge of radicalism epitomized by 1968 made especially urgent. The District of Columbia, however, offered a particularly generative place for working them through due to its constitutive contradictions. On the one hand, the state and state power were immediately evident: not only was the federal government the economic base of the city and wider region, Washington formed a locus for federal policy experiments, receiving an outsized share of government funding and attention. On the other hand, District residents lacked even the most basic channels for democratic redress at the time, with neither the power to elect and hold accountable their own local government or have their voices heard in Congress.

With the dismantling of Jim Crow voting restrictions in 1965, the inability of the District to elect its own leaders grew even more conspicuous. Over the previous decade and a half, the

[4] On the slippages between self-help and self-determination and how they were constitutive of poverty governance under mid-century US liberalism, see Alyosha Goldstein, *Poverty in Common: The Politics of Community Action during the American Century* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012). On participatory decision-making practices within social movements, see Francesca Polletta, *Freedom is an Endless Meeting: Democracy in American Social Movements* (Chicago: Chicago, 2012). On authenticity as a driving concern of the New Left, see Doug Rossinow, *The Politics of Authenticity: Liberalism, Christianity, and the New Left in America* (New York: Columbia, 1998).

proportion of city residents who were African American had grown from just over one third to nearly twice that figure, making the nation's capital the first major city with a majority-Black population. This incongruity was noted by a generation of young yet battle hardened veterans of the southern freedom movement, who with the winding down of organizing drives in Alabama and Mississippi turned their sights towards Washington. Among them was Marion Barry, who moved to the city to launch a Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) chapter and soon instigated the Free D.C. Movement, a boycott drive to get local businesses to back the call for home rule. The creation of a presidentially appointed mayor and city council to replace the three-member board of commissioners by the Johnson Administration in 1967, while a majority of its members were Black, deferred the deeper issue of self-governance.[5]

The denial of democracy in the capital spurred multiple struggles for autonomy, from the Black Land Movement's plan for a self-reliant Shaw to the formation of an elected neighborhood government by the Adams Morgan Organization. Organizers built alternative institutions such as community assemblies, economic cooperatives, and mutual aid projects to express their visions for the future. Residents found regular ways to thwart the designs of meddling Congressmen, federal administrators, and the appointed city council through creative and often controversial forms of protest. Activists did not wait, in other words, to start creating the city they wanted. Yet they also took advantage of opportunities for formal political participation as they became available, refusing to see doing so antithetical to their other strategies for pursuing change.

With the passage of the District of Columbia Home Rule Act in 1973, residents obtained the power to elect the mayor and city council while Congress preserved final say over the city's budget and laws. Even as it dismissed home rule as a colonial half measure that preserved the

[5] Lauren Pearlman, *Democracy's Capital: Black Political Power in Washington, D.C., 1960s-1970s*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2019), 19-56.

unequal treatment of Black citizens, the D.C. Statehood Party backed Julius Hobson's run for a council seat, concluding that doing so would provide a platform for relaying both their argument for statehood and agenda for social reconstruction. With an inaugural council comprised largely of civil rights veterans, activists moved quickly to make their stamp on the city, pushing for laws that strengthened tenants' rights, discouraged property speculation, and amplified the voices of local communities. They also pursued ballot initiatives, taking their fights for statehood and the right to shelter directly to voters and the city's Black majority when the council was reluctant to address their demands. Alongside these local forays, DC's activists used their proximity to the federal halls of power as an asset, working with members of Congress to hold hearings on residential displacement and homelessness and secure funding for their campaign objectives. In combining community power building and disruptive forms of dissent with the more traditional tools of legislative advocacy and electoral campaigning, organizers often made powerful inroads.

The passage to home rule and the openings it created despite its limitations occurred in the same moment that federal support for cities was swiftly receding. While spared the worst effects of deindustrialization, DC shared with other urban centers the intractable problems of disinvestment, residential flight, rising social service costs, and a diminishing tax base. Federal retrenchment in the wake of the abandoned War on Poverty and a wave of deep recessions only further compounded these problems. Elected on reform agendas, Barry and other Black mayors then taking the helm across the US instead found themselves slashing city budgets and courting private business. From holding high hopes for the city's new direction, organizers were forced to defend modest gains, and advances made in affordable housing were outpaced by rising rates of homelessness. Activists such as those affiliated with the Community for Creative Non-Violence also increasingly filled in the gaps of the faltering welfare state, channeling energies once

dedicated to long-range goals to the meeting of immediate needs. Already present by the mid-1970s, these trends accelerated and consolidated under the Reagan administration, which embraced domestic austerity as an essential feature of its New Federalist vision of governance.[6]

Examining how organizations formed in the early 1970s fared over the long haul reveals how the spatial imaginaries of left urban social movements shifted in relation to this changing conjuncture and activists' perceptions of the opportunities it afforded. The transformations in geographic scale traced across the dissertation's chapters—nation, city, neighborhood, shelter—corresponded with the recalibration of federal social and urban policy and wider retreat from state provision taking place in the period, shifts which circumscribed what reform-oriented elected officials could achieve locally and re-entrenched temporarily destabilized racial and economic hierarchies nationally. While not fully representative of the diversity of grassroots organizing within Washington from the late 1960s through the early 1990s, the four organizations the project follows are in this deeper sense exemplary. From utopic longings for self-determination that grated against the upper boundaries of the War on Poverty, activists a decade later found themselves struggling to secure the daily survival of their communities. As dreams of revolution receded, local problems remained, and organizers were resolved to tackle them when and where they could. While the question of scale and where social movements should best concentrate their energies had long been a subject of strategic debate, Black Power and New Left radicals weathered a largely one-sided winnowing of the terrain of struggle from above. Resisting these restrictions, they also adapted to them out of necessity, and the strategies they developed over the following years often reflected these structural constraints even as they held out hopes for more profound forms of transformation.

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[6] Robert Biles, *The Fate of Cities: Urban America and the Federal Government, 1945-2000* (Lawrence: Kansas, 2011), 200-286.

While reckoning head-on with the structural constraints these organizations faced—as well as the internal contradictions that inhibited their reach—the story "Counter-Capital" tells is not simply a tale of defeat. Nor is it primarily one. Tracking the many twists and turns of their campaigns, it narrates the stunning successes these organizers achieved despite often long odds. Dismissed by some as impractical dreamers and obstinate radicals, it considers how a number of the ideas these activists advanced have now become commonplace, from the demand to prioritize racial equity in urban planning and growing support for DC statehood to community benefits agreements and housing first policies. Following their experiments, it assesses how they served as important forerunners for later efforts and furnished a base from which future generations could build. In offering a genealogy of struggle within the capital, the project reveals how past battles set the stage for those of the present while relaying lessons that remain pertinent to campaigns for the right to the city both within Washington and far beyond it.[7]

Literature Review and Project Interventions

Drawing on a diverse array of archival materials including organizational newsletters, meeting minutes, event flyers, campaign brochures, and correspondence; underground press and community papers alongside mainstream news outlets; documentary film and preserved footage; and oral histories and personal interviews, "Counter-Capital" contributes to debates in the fields of African American, social movement, and urban history. The project is further animated by and participates in discussions taking place across the correlating interdisciplinary fields of African

[7] The World Charter for the Right to the City was developed from a series of dialogues held at the Social Forum of the Americas, World Urban Forum, and World Social Forum in 2004-05. See "The World Charter for the Right to the City," UCLG Committee on Social Inclusion, Participatory Democracy and Human Rights, 2005, https://www.uclg-cisdp.org/sites/default/files/documents/files/2021-06/WorldCharterRighttoCity.pdf. For an intellectual genealogy of the concept of the right to the city, see David Harvey, *Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution* (London: Verso, 2012), ix-26. For a digital museum exhibition that employs the right to the city framework in its examination of neighborhood-based struggles for racial equity and urban autonomy in the District of Columbia, see Samir Meghelli, curator, *A Right the City*, Smithsonian Anacostia Museum, 2020, https://storymaps.arcgis.com/collections/34d99cccb2c5454da7b4f08e482c1987?item=1.

American studies, American studies, and urban studies, bringing aspects of these fields that don't always speak to one another into closer conversation. Laboring at these intersections, it shows how sustained attention to space—and specific places—can reframe the historiography of Black Power and the New Left and how centering activists and their campaigns expands the literature on Washington while troubling conventions in the composite portrait of late 20th C. US cities.

Contested Legacies of the Black Power Era

Over the past twenty-five years, historians have undertaken a wide-ranging reappraisal of the Black Power era and the quests for political, economic, and cultural self-determination that it inspired.[8] Challenging the post-civil rights declension narratives that have long held sway in the discipline, these studies have dismantled the Manichean opposition of civil rights and Black Power strategies along with the prevailing periodization that bound the latter between 1966 and 1975.[9] Beginning with studies of key figures such as Amiri Baraka and Robert F. Williams and groups with national reach such as the Black Panther Party and the US Organization, the burgeoning subfield of Black Power Studies has dramatically expanded, detailing lesser-known battles for community control over housing, jobs, and education and struggles for self-definition in cities across the nation.[10] Analyzing the gender politics of Black Power's many modes,

[8] Peniel Joseph's widely cited charge to reconceptualize the movement's origins and ends is often regarded as a watershed moment within the new Black Power historiography. See Peniel Joseph, "Black Liberation Without Apology: Reconceptualizing the Black Power Movement," *The Black Scholar* 31, no. 3-4 (2001): 2-19. See also his overarching account of the era, Peniel Joseph, *Waiting 'Til the Midnight Hour: A Narrative History of Black Power in America* (New York: Holt, 2006).

[9] See Joseph's assessment of the field's dramatic growth nearly a decade later in Peniel Joseph, "The Black Power Movement: A State of the Field," *The Journal of American History* 96, no. 3 (2009): 751-776.

[10] Komozi Woodard, *A Nation within a Nation: Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones) and Black Power Politics* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999); Timothy B. Tyson, *Radio Free Dixie: Robert F. Williams and the Roots of Black Power* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999); Charles Jones, ed., *The Black Panther Party Reconsidered* (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1998); Scot Brown, *Fighting for Us: Maulana Karenga, the Us Organization, and Black Cultural Nationalism* (New York: New York University Press, 2003); Robert O. Self, *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland* (Princeton: Princeton, 2005); Matthew Countryman, *Up South: Civil Rights and Black Power in Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: Penn, 2005); Jeanne F. Theoharis and Komozi Woodard, eds. *Freedom North: Black Freedom Struggles Outside the South* (New York: Palgrave, 2003).

scholars have provided nuanced accounts of the role of women's leadership within nationalist formations and the emergence of autonomous Black feminist organizations that challenged both their limits and those of the majority-white feminist movement.[11] They have examined Black Power's impact behind prison walls, on college campuses, and in arts venues, demonstrating how it engendered new forms of political insurgency, intellectual analysis, and cultural production. [12] Scholars have also traced its global itineraries, from its Pan-African roots to revolutionary routes in the 1960-70s, decentering accounts of Black Power anchored solely to the United States.[13]

The rise of Black Power Studies and its increasing prominence within the discipline has brought to the fore interpretive debates over both the overarching frameworks used to understand the larger Black freedom struggle and its evolution in the twentieth century and the legacies of the Black Power era in particular. Advocates of the "Long Civil Rights" approach and the related assertion of a combined civil rights and Black Power era assert an underlying continuity between

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[11] Dayo F. Gore, Jeanne Theoharis, and Komozi Woodard, eds. *Want to Start a Revolution? Radical Women in the Black Freedom Struggle* (New York: New York University Press, 2009); Ashley Farmer, *Remaking Black Power: How Black Women Transformed an Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017*;* Robyn C. Spencer*, The Revolution Has Come: Black Power, Gender, and the Black Panther Party in Oakland* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016); Kimberly Springer, *Living for the Revolution: Black Feminist Organizations, 1968-1980* (Durham N.C.: Duke University Press, 2005); Ula Y. Taylor, *The Promise of Patriarchy: Women and the Nation of Islam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017).

[12] Dan Berger, *Captive Nation: Black Prison Organizing in the Civil Rights Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014); Garrett Felber, *Those Who Know Don't Say: The Nation of Islam, the Black Freedom Movement, and the Carceral State* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2020); Martha Biondi, *The Black Revolution on Campus* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012); Stefan M. Bradley, *Harlem Vs. Columbia University : Black Student Power in the Late 1960s* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009); Ibram X. Kendi, *The Black Campus Movement: Black Students and the Racial Reconstitution of Higher Education, 1965-1972* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); Derrick E. White, *The Challenge of Blackness: The Institute of the Black World and Political Activism in the 1970s* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2011); Jonathan Fenderson, *Building the Black Arts Movement: Hoyt Fuller and the Cultural Politics of the 1960s* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2019); James Edward Smethurst, *The Black Arts Movement: Literary Nationalism in the 1960s and 1970s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005).

[13] Joshua Bloom and Waldo E Martin, *Black Against Empire: The History and Politics of the Black Panther Party* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013); Seth M. Markle, *A Motorcycle on Hell Run: Tanzania, Black Power, and the Uncertain Future of Pan-Africanism, 1964-1974* (Michigan State University Press, 2017); Quito Swan, *Black Power in Bermuda: The Struggle for Decolonization* (New York: Palgrave, 2010); Quito Swan, *Pauulu's Diaspora: Black Internationalism and Environmental Justice* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2020); Christopher M. Tinson, *Radical Intellect: Liberator Magazine and Black Activism in the 1960s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017); Judy Tzu-Chun Wu, *Radicals on the Road: Internationalism, Orientalism, and Feminism during the Vietnam Era* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013).

campaigns for community control in the urban north, the battles to desegregate the South, and fights for fair housing and access to jobs in the 1930-40s.[14] While not discounting these lineages, critics of these frameworks contend that they evacuate the conceptual distinctions between civil rights and Black Power, their often contrasting long-range objectives, and the historical ruptures that occasioned them.[15] Synthetic accounts of Black Power that assess its ongoing relevance have heightened these debates, with disagreements over its relation to the rise of Black officials and the turn to Democratic Party politics typically occupying their center.[16] Wading into these debates, this study sides with those that refuse the implicit maturation thesis of accounts that posit a broad arc from the call for self-determination to the growth of a Black political class to the 2008 election of Barack Obama and instead locate Black Power's chief inheritances within the ongoing forms of grassroots struggle.[17]

The amalgamation of the civil rights and Black Power eras requires a smoothing of rough edges that was rejected by many Black Power adherents in their own time. In so doing, this popular interpretive schema can at times relay what were highly contested matters through a gauzy, reconciliatory haze. Chapter one's treatment of the Black Land Movement foregrounds a moment when the meaning of community control was a subject of fierce disagreement among Black activists, describing the different ways this aim was taken up through a close examination

[14] Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, "The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past," *The Journal of American History* 91, no. 4 (2005): 1233–63.
[15] Sundiata Keita Cha-Jua and Clarence Lang, "The 'Long Movement' As Vampire: Temporal and Spatial Fallacies in Recent Black Freedom Studies," *The Journal of African American History* 92, no. 2 (2007): 265–88.
[16] Peniel Joseph, *Dark Days, Bright Nights: From Black Power to Barack Obama* (New York: Basic, 2010); Jonathan Fenderson, "Towards the gentrification of Black Power(?)," *Race & Class* 55, no.1 (2013): 1-22.
[17] Joshua M. Myers, *We Are Worth Fighting For: A History of the Howard University Student Protest of 1989* (New York: New York University Press, 2019); Edward Onaci*, Free the Land: The Republic of New Afrika and the Pursuit of a Black Nation-State* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2020); Akinyele Umoja, "The People Must Decide: Chokwe Lumumba, New Black Power, and the Potential for Participatory Democracy in Mississippi," *The Black Scholar* 48, no. 2 (2018), 7–19; Rhonda Y. Williams, *Concrete Demands: The Search for Black Power in the 20th Centur*y (London: Routledge, 2015).

of the Shaw neighborhood. For Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) members such as Walter Fauntroy, the founder of the Model Inner City Community Organization (MICCO), citizen participation in the urban renewal process offered the potential to finally extend the benefits of full citizenship to African Americans confined in the nation's ghettoes, providing social uplift while powerfully affirming their voices. Those in Shaw drawn to the call for Black independence initially doubted MICCO's ability to deliver on these promises; in the wake of the 1968 assassination of Dr. King and the four-day uprising that followed, many found MICCO's process and the presuppositions underwriting it no longer tenable. State-delegated Black administration of the redevelopment process, they contended, paled in comparison to a grounded vision of self-determination initiated directly by Shaw residents. Siding decisively with the latter, the Black Land Movement reframed community control as a prefigurative practice of Black nation building. In tracking closely these debates within a single neighborhood and how they evolved in relation to specific events, the project corroborates the need to analytically disentangle these eras and clarify the breaks that attended them, the stakes of which extend far beyond questions of historiographic interpretation.

Chapter two's discussion of the D.C. Statehood Party would seem, at first glance, to signal the opposite conclusion. Its founder Julius Hobson limned the boundaries between civil rights and Black Power. The party also regularly ran candidates for local elections. Its history, however, offers a counterpoint to narratives that convey the pragmatic turn to the Democratic Party on the part of Black activists as the logical next step for the movement and a sign of its political maturity. In working to assemble Black electoral power outside of the Democratic mainstream, the party demonstrated how activists could take part in electoral politics without making concessions to private interests or distancing themselves from bold social movement

demands. When elected officials embraced incremental reforms as the path to expanding the city's political rights, the party acted as a sole voice insisting that only statehood would ensure DC control over its own affairs. The 1982 Statehood Constitutional Convention, a product of seeds the party had sown over the previous decade, put forward a deeply progressive vision for the city's self-governance rooted in the aspirations of its working-class Black majority.[18]

The Black Land Movement and D.C. Statehood Party's commitments to their principles each came at a cost, though, with the former struggling to gain ground in Shaw and the latter operating mostly at the margins of the city's political life. The Black Land Movement's fierce attachment to independence meant they also struggled to secure financial resources, as a result much of their constructive agenda for the neighborhood was consigned to the drawing board. The D.C. Statehood Party not only dealt with the multiple barriers to victory that confronted third parties, they also struggled to thread the needle between centering Black leadership and creating a multiracial party formation, revealing the tensions between Black Power emphases on self-determination and the hopes some maintained for forging a wider New Left coalition. Both organizations were formed initially around charismatic male leaders, an orientation which brought multiple drawbacks even as it offered a certain dynamism. Owing to their radical stances, members of each group were also subjected to state surveillance and targets of federal investigation. Wrestling with the tensions their trajectories each generated, the project considers the dilemmas that attended efforts to build grassroots Black Power in the District.

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[18] For studies critically assessing the Black electoral turn towards the Democratic Party in the 1970s, see Cedric Johnson, *Revolutionaries to Race Leaders: Black Power and the Making of African American Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007); Manning Marable*, Race, Reform, and Rebellion: The Second Reconstruction and Beyond in Black America, 1945-2006*, 3rd edition (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2007); 146-181; and Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, *From #blacklivesmatter to Black Liberation* (Chicago: Haymarket, 2015), 75-106. Conversely, scholars have shown how Black elected officials within the Democratic Party maintained ties to Black Power ideals, from calls for reparations to policies promoting African development. On the latter, see Benjamin Talton, *In This Land of Plenty: Mickey Leland and Africa in American Politics* (Philadelphia: Penn, 2019).

Upending Reductive New Left Mythologies

While scholars have painstakingly demolished caricatures of the Black Power era, reductive and misleading portraits remain in circulation when considering the broader political and cultural radicalism to which it was linked: the New Left. Such accounts chart its hopeful rise in the early 1960s with the heroic Southern freedom struggle as its vanguard; its height in mass protests against the war in Vietnam and defection from the dominant social order more broadly, seeming to herald revolutionary change; and its largely self-driven implosion shortly thereafter. In these narratives, the 1970s appears as a forlorn coda: a period of declining political activity punctuated by violent excess, with what was left of 'the movement' retreating into the cul-de-sacs of identity or joining doctrinaire Marxist sects increasingly divorced from the real world. Ironically, among the main sources of these myths have been New Left veterans themselves.[19]

This distorted picture relies on a truncated view of both who comprised the New Left and what constitutes left politics more generally, with Students for a Democratic Society and a small number of white male activists and intellectuals standing in for a diverse, fractious, overlapping series of movements.[20] Challenging this meta-narrative and its repeat circulation, historians and interdisciplinary scholars have traced the multiple upsurges that took place across the terrains of race, class, gender, sexuality, nation, occupation, and religion, redrawing the boundaries of who formed part of the New Left while charting how they reshaped the cultures of radicalism within and beyond the United States.[21] They have also pushed back its chronology, locating the New

[19] Movement memoirs and scholarly analyses produced by former participants include Todd Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage* (New York: Bantam Books, 1987); Tom Hayden, *Reunion: A Memoir* (New York: Random House, 1988); and James Miller, *"Democracy is in the Streets": From Port Huron to the Siege of Chicago* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987). This section draws on Van Gosse's assessment of New Left historiography in Van Gosse, "A Movement of Movements: The Definition and Periodization of the New Left," in *A Companion to Post-1945 America*, eds. Jean-Christophe Agnew and Roy Rosenweig (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 277-302.
[20] Wini Breines, "Whose New Left?" *Journal of American History*, 75, no. 2 (1988): 528–45.
[21] For representative edited collections and texts indicative of much larger bodies of literature see: Dan Berger, ed. *Hidden Histories of the 1970s: Histories of Radicalism* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2010); Dan

Left's roots in the "Old" left, early civil rights alliances, and the pacifist movement.[22] Finally, they have offered balanced assessments of its lasting impact across civil society, the academy, electoral politics, and popular culture, demonstrating how many of its assumptions about race, gender, and sexuality have become commonplace even as they remain sites of contention.[23]

While a complete overview of this literature is outside the scope of this section, I want to highlight two areas of recent intervention that demonstrate how closer attention to the activism of particular communities in the 1970s topples depictions of the decade as dominated by political apathy and overturns the assumption that explorations of identity led activists away from broad-based organizing. First is the growing body of scholarship that considers the movements for self-determination that the call for Black Power helped to inspire among other groups, including Arab American, Asian American, Latinx, and Native revolutionary nationalist organizations. From local organizing around housing, schools, and hospitals to transnational campaigns focused on securing treaty rights or challenging imperialist policies, such groups remained active often well into the decade. In the process, they helped create pan-ethnic formations across distinct national

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Berger and Emily K. Hobson, eds. *Remaking Radicalism: A Grassroots Documentary Reader of the United States, 1973-2001* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2020); Mike Davis and Jon Wiener, *Set the Night on Fire: L.A. in the Sixties* (London: Verso, 2020); Martin Duberman, *Stonewall: The Definitive Story of the LGBT Uprising that Changed America* (New York: Dutton, 1993); Alice Echols, *Daring to Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America, 1967–1975* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989); Max Elbaum, *Revolution in the Air: Sixties Radicals Turn to Lenin, Mao, and Che* (London: Verso, 2002); Andrew E. Hunt, *The Turning: A History of Vietnam Veterans Against the War* (New York: New York University Press, 2001).

[22] Maurice Isserman, *If I Had a Hammer: The Death of the Old Left and the Birth of the New Left* (New York: Basic Books, 1987); Kate Weigand, *Red Feminism: American Communists and the Making of Women's Liberation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001; Van Gosse, *Where the Boys Are: Cuba, Cold War America and the Making of a New Left* (London: Verso, 1993); Barbara Epstein, *Political Protest and Cultural Revolution: Nonviolent Direct Action in the 1970s and 1980s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991); Joseph Kip Kosek, *Acts of Conscience: Christian Nonviolence and Modern American Democracy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009); Rossinow, *The Politics of Authenticity*.

[23] Van Gosse, *Rethinking the New Left: An Interpretative History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); L.A. Kauffman, *Direct Action: Protest and the Reinvention of American Radicalism* (London: Verso, 2017).

origins, contested their exclusion from academic curricula and popular culture, built lasting political coalitions, and formed a front line of resistance to the retreat from civil rights gains.[24]

The second body of scholarship is the literature that explores the entangled struggles for feminist and queer liberation in the 1970s and how activists sought freedom from both state and interpersonal violence. Women and gay, lesbian, and queer organizers drew connections between the unevenly disbursed vulnerabilities they confronted daily and larger systems that produce harm, challenging the assumption that personal safety could be achieved through the expansion of policing and prisons. They also situated sexual autonomy as inherently linked to the struggles against war and racism, forging multiracial and internationalist alliances and further developing intersectional forms of political and cultural analysis. Challenging single issue politics and its circumscriptions, many feminist and queer activists expressed an expansive politics in the 1970s that built out from their examinations of personal experience and embodied social location.[25]

Shifting perspective to the local level, this study further contributes to the project of reevaluating the New Left and its multiple trajectories in the 1970s. Changing scales, it argues, disrupts the interpretive tropes of fragmentation and dissolution by mid-decade and how they

[24] Nick Estes, *Our History Is the Future: Standing Rock versus the Dakota Access Pipeline, and the Long Tradition of Indigenous Resistance* (London: Verso, 2019); Johanna Fernández, *The Young Lords: A Radical History* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2020); Karen Ishizuka, *Serve the People: Making Asian America in the Long Sixties* (London: Verso, 2018); Diana Johnson, *Seattle in Coalition: Multiracial Alliances, Labor Politics, and Transnational Activism in the Pacific Northwest, 1970-1999* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2023); Jimmy Patino, *Raza Sí, Migra No: Chicano Movement Struggles for Immigrant Rights in San Diego* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017); Pamela E. Pennock, *The Rise of the Arab American Left: Activists, Allies, and Their Fight against Imperialism and Racism, 1960s-1980s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017).

[25] Christina B. Hanhardt, *Safe Space: Gay Neighborhood History and the Politics of Violence* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013); Emily K. Hobson, *Lavender and Red: Liberation and Solidarity in the Gay and Lesbian Left* (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2016); Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, ed. *How We Get Free: Black Feminism and the Combahee Reiver Collective* (Chicago: Haymarket, 2017); Emily L. Thuma, *All Our Trials: Prisons, Policing, and the Feminist Fight to End Violence* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2019); Anne M. Valk, *Radical Sisters: Second-Wave Feminism and Black Liberation in Washington, D.C.* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008).

preclude a more accurate accounting of grassroots organizing and its evolution in the period.[26] Instead, in looking locally and paying attention to the politics of place one finds ongoing efforts to form viable coalitions across race, gender, class, sexuality, and language; attempts to pilot municipal and neighborhood alternatives in the absence of federal reforms; and enduring commitments to the pursuit of social transformation that contradict portrayals of 'the me decade.'

In different ways and with varying degrees of effectiveness, the D.C. Statehood Party and the Adams Morgan Organization (the subject of chapter three) each staked their futures on their ability to create alliances across longstanding lines of division. For the D.C. Statehood Party, the path from protest to electoral power was premised on bringing together dedicated participants of local Black liberation, antiwar, feminist, and gay and lesbian movements, including disaffected members of the federal workforce. Doing so inevitably precipitated conflict, with party members calling for it to confront the sexism within its own ranks and wrangling over what it meant to be both multiracial and intentionally Black-led. The presence of these conflicts and the persistence of the party through them, though, offers its own counter-testimony. Similarly, the Adams Morgan Organization's goal of forming a community assembly equally representative of the neighborhood's Black, Latinx, and white residents was an arduous process often marked by contention and contradiction, one that required compromise and the overcoming of suspicion. Efforts to work through conflicts rooted in race, class, and linguistic difference in its formative stage, however, endowed the group and its campaigns with an authority most community organizations lacked while ensuring it a staying power across the decade. Intellectually driven

[26] On how thinking about scale and across scales reframes the political history of the 1970s more broadly, Suleiman Osman, "Glocal America: The Politics of Scale in the 1970s," in *Shaped by the State: Toward a New Political History of the Twentieth Centur*y, eds. Brent Cebul, Lily Geismer, and Mason B. Williams (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2019), 241-260.

histories that assert the New Left's vanguard role in initiating an "age of fracture," the project contends, obscure these on-the-ground attempts to construct culturally capacious left coalitions.[27]

Centering the New Left's local offshoots demonstrates the significant gaps and analytical stumbling blocks that remain in social movement historiography, ones which in their silences and presuppositions perpetuate the myth of its swift dissolution. Little has been written about the bumper crop of state and local third parties formed by Black liberation, peace, and environmental activists in the 1970s as an alternative to the two-party politics of "lesser evilism" or the surprising inroads their candidates made at times. Neither have the creative responses put forward for the many problems faced by the era's municipalities by the first generation of New Left activists to enter state and local office, many affiliated with the Conference on Alternative State & Local Public Policies, received recent scholarly attention. Part of these developments, uplifting the history of the D. C. Statehood Party confirms that much more work needs to be done to understand the multiple ways that activists responded to political setbacks on the national level, including by seeking to wield state power and craft local policy.[28]

The neighborhood movement of the 1970s, while representing a wide range of political and cultural impulses, formed one of the key trajectories taken up by New Left activists. These links have not always been highlighted, with contemporaneous social-scientific literature on the movement portraying neighborhood organizers primarily as the heirs of Alinsky, an interpretive lens that ignored both the more immediate source of politicization for many along with the wider

[27] For versions of the splintering 1970s meta-narrative that cast New Left radicalism as a key source of the New Deal Order's downfall and resurgence of political conservatism, see Michael Kazin, *American Dreamers: How the Left Changed a Nation* (New York: Knopf, 2011); Doug Rossinow, *Visions of Progress: The Left-Liberal Tradition in America* (Philadelphia: Penn, 2008); and Daniel T. Rodgers, *The Age of Fracture* (Cambridge: Harvard, 2011).
[28]For an example of promising work along these lines, see: Keith Riley, "Cities of Solidarity: Left-Liberal Coalition and the Rise and Fall of Local-Level Foreign Policy," diss., (Temple University, 2022). For an earlier study of New Left municipalism, see W. J. Conroy, *Challenging the Boundaries of Reform: Socialism in Burlington* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990).

dreams they attached to their local campaigns.[29] More recently, historians have begun to explore what was variously cast as the 'neighborhood revolt,' 'backyard revolution,' or 'new citizen's movement' and its relationship to the New Left. These studies have analyzed the intellectual origins of the neighborhood movement and its institutional ties to the Institute for Policy Studies and gauged how it reflected an increasingly popular scale of politics that was "militantly local" and "neither exclusively Left nor Right" in its objectives. [30]

Lending further complexity to this emergent scholarly picture, this study considers how the campaigns that DC's localists undertook required them to work across multiple scales simultaneously and expressed commitments to broadly transformative and distinctly left-aligned goals well into the decade. The origins and organizing campaigns of the Adams Morgan Organization—which not only took part in the neighborhood movement but helped to coalesce it nationally—display the clear links between Black Power, a broader New Left that included white and Latinx activists, and the turn to local concerns many undertook in these years. Beginning with the blocks they walked each day, its members worked to address the problems that plagued cities in the period, from disinvestment and its deleterious environmental effects to the bursts of frenzied speculation it brought on. The solutions they proposed for these problems—such as taxing away the profits of 'reverse blockbusting' property developers almost entirely—often carried radical and wide-ranging implications. Further, in an era when trust in public institutions was abysmally low, the Adams Morgan Organization worked to revitalize and reimagine

[29] Harry C. Boyte, *The Backyard Revolution: Understanding the New Citizen Movement* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1980); Jeffrey R. Henig, *Neighborhood Mobilization: Redevelopment and Response* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1982); Michael R. Williams, *Neighborhood Organizations: Seeds of a New Urban Life* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1985).
[30] Benjamin Looker, "Visions of Autonomy: The New Left and the Neighborhood Government Movement of the 1970s," *Journal of Urban History* 38, no. 3 (2012): 578-581; Suleiman Osman, "The Decade of the Neighborhood," in *Rightward Bound: Making America Conservative in the 1970s*, eds. Bruce J. Schulman and Julian E. Zelizer (Cambridge: Harvard, 2008), 106-127; Michael Stewart Foley, *Front Porch Politics: The Forgotten Heyday of American Activism in the 1970s and 1980s*, (New York: Hill and Wang, 2013).

democratic practice, forming structures for direct and participatory decision-making. Far from provincial, New Left localism sought to meet some of the era's largest challenges.

Reaching their peak in 1976-78, AMO's campaigns to curb land speculation and prevent displacement demand a widening of New Left historiography's aperture. So too do those of the Community for Creative Non-Violence, a countercultural Christian commune that formed during the war in Vietnam yet commanded headlines a decade later as a detractor of Reagan's austerity regime. Remembered for their fierce advocacy and dedicated accompaniment of the homeless, the group consistently drew out the links between the growing number of people on the streets and the redirection of the social wage towards war and preparation for its instigation. In so doing, they revealed the continued purchase of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s analysis in "Beyond Vietnam" for the 1980s and the ongoing ways that people were striving, if stumbling, to realize his beloved community vision amidst rising revanchist tides.[31] While the resurgence of political conservatism in the United States has captured the attention of a generation of historians, grassroots opposition to the Reagan agenda and its partial lineage in the New Left is a story just starting to be told.[32]

Urban Histories of the Neoliberal Policy Turn

Historians have begun to trace how the 1970-80s formed a pivotal moment in the life of cities, as worsening political and economic circumstances and the withdrawal of federal support led to growing private sector involvement in urban governance.[33] This scholarship joins an interdisciplinary urban studies literature on the rise of neoliberalism that is already rather extensive: critical geographers have charted how reinvestment in the built urban environment

[31] Martin Luther King, Jr., "A Time to Break the Silence," in *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, ed. James Melvin Washington (New York: Harper, 1986), 231-244.
[32] Bradford Martin, *The Other Eighties: A Secret History of America in the Age of Reagan* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2013); Kauffman, *Direct Action*.
[33] Andrew J. Diamond and Thomas J. Sugrue, eds. *Neoliberal Cities: The Remaking of Postwar America* (New York: New York University Press, 2020); Kim Phillips-Fein, *Fear City: New York's Fiscal Crisis and the Rise of Austerity Politics* (New York: Macmillan, 2017).

provided a 'spatial fix' for capital amid a global slump, sociologists have plotted how the consolidation of the financial sector's power spawned an urban service economy whose benefits were sharply uneven in their distribution, and political scientists have considered the multiple paths through which urban policy was reshaped according to a market-driven entrepreneurialism, among other interventions.[34] Complicating this wider portrait of the neoliberal turn, historians have questioned what an analytical emphasis on its novelty conceals, such as the ways in which racialized populations have always been subject to predatory market governance or how private sector outsourcing was already a key component of the archetypically 'liberal' War on Poverty.[35] They have also sought to demonstrate how the recreation of the city in the late twentieth century was not simply the product of decisions made by financial and policy elites or the ascendance of conservative ideology, but rather a multifaceted process that involved many different actors and motivations. The neoliberal urban present, they contend, was also built from the ground up.

Facing issues such as a dearth of housing, struggling schools, and abandoned blocks and parks, residents of 1970s cities experimented, finding creative ways to address these obstacles that often relied on the private sector, whether business, foundations, or the energy of dedicated volunteers. Following these "fixers," to borrow Julia Rabig's term, a range of recent studies have assessed their mixed legacy, at once ensuring access to essential resources in an era of declining state investment and helping facilitate the shift to private-public partnerships now central to neoliberal urban governance.[36] The range of initiatives they undertook was broad, from self-help

[34] David Harvey, *The Limits to Capital* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982); Saskia Sassen, *The Global City: New York, London, Tokyo* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); Neil Brenner and Nik Theodore, "Cities and the Geographies of "Actually Existing Neoliberalism"," *Antipode* 34, no.3 (2002): 349-379. For a primer on the wider urban studies literature on neoliberalism, see Jason R. Hackworth, *The Neoliberal City: Governance, Ideology, and Development in American Urbanism*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007.
[35] N. D. B. Connolly, "The Strange Career of American Liberalism," in *Shaped by the State*, 62-95; Brent Cebul, *Illusions of Progress: Business, Poverty, and Liberalism in the American Century* (Philadelphia: Penn, 2013).
[36] Claire Dunning, *Nonprofit Neighborhoods: An Urban History of Inequality and the American State* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2022); Brian D. Goldstein, *The Roots of Urban Renaissance: Gentrification and the*

and homesteader housing projects to the nonprofit delivery of services such as tutoring and job training to all-volunteer park cleanups and street clinics. An embrace of these efforts at the local and national level helped to underwrite their institutionalization, with city funding and federal block grants spurring the growth of direct service organizations and community development corporations. As the nonprofit sector matured in its professional and technical capacity it also took on a greater share of municipal service provision, directing neighborhood redevelopment initiatives, piloting charter schools, and erecting citywide community health systems. Making an impact where they could, organizations often founded earlier on dreams of eradicating racialized urban inequality were instead conscripted into, or volunteered for, its everyday management.

Activists with roots in the radical ferment of the late 1960s and early 1970s took part in these transformations in complex ways. Detailing the processes of negotiation and pushback they engaged in, the project also considers how certain New Left tendencies were conducive to, or at the very least coincided with, the urban neoliberal shift. Chief among these were how emphases on autonomy converged at times with anti-statism and commitments to self-reliance paralleled the demands of austerity measures. The Adams Morgan Organization and its 'Do It Yourself' ethos, sweeping streets and tilling gardens, were held up as a model for citizen cooperation by the National Commission on Neighborhoods, an initiative that formed a key plank of the Carter administration's decentralized and devolved vision for urban policy. In this sense, the group's efforts form part of the wider seedbed of urban voluntarism in which neoliberal privatization blossomed.[37] Its negotiations with Perpetual Bank, securing access to capital for affordable

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Struggle Over Harlem (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2017); Benjamin Holtzman, *The Long Crisis: New York City and the Path to Neoliberalism* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2021); Suleiman Osman, ""We're Doing it Ourselves": The Unexpected Origins of New York City's Public–Private Parks during the 1970s Fiscal Crisis," *Journal of Planning History* 16, no. 2 (2017): 162-174; Julia Rabig*, The Fixers: Devolution, Development, and Civil Society in Newark, 1960-1990* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016).

[37] Tracy Neumann, "Privatization, Devolution, and Jimmy Carter's National Urban Policy," *Journal of Urban History* 40, no. 2 (2014): 283-300; Thomas J. Sugrue, "Carter's Urban Policy Crisis," in *The Carter Presidency:*

housing redevelopment, helped create the template for community reinvestment in the years that followed. Preserving a foothold for lower-income residents in rapidly changing neighborhoods, such strategies at the same time often contributed to their gentrification.[38]

Similarly, the Community for Creative Non-Violence's decentralized provision of direct services for society's most marginalized was undertaken in a spirit of resistance to the Reagan austerity regime. Finding ways to shelter the homeless and feed hungry people on a threadbare budget, though, was from another angle fully consistent with the rolling back of the welfare state. With the passage of the McKinney Act, a bill authorizing federal funding streams for emergency shelter programs that the group helped push through, these dilemmas weren't so much addressed as institutionalized.[39] Further, the predominantly white activist group's criticisms of the Barry administration and its handling of the homelessness crisis, while raising legitimate concerns about shelter conditions and improper spending, contributed to a wider media atmosphere that questioned both the power of government to solve problems and the capacity of Black municipal leadership. The expansion of the nonprofit sector 'shadow state' its volunteer efforts exemplified often affected a reassertion of white control over social services and their distribution, limiting the agency and imperiling the jobs Black women had only recently gained in the public sector. [40]

Not all of these contradictions were lost on the city's activists in their own time, and the project accompanies them as they confront the limits of a politics centered on self-assertion and

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Policy Choices in the Post-New Deal Era, eds. Gary M. Fink and Hugh Davis Graham (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1998), 137-157.

[38] Rebecca K. Marchiel, *After Redlining: The Urban Reinvestment Movement in the Era of Financial Deregulation* (Chicago: Chicago, 2020); James DeFillipis, "Community Control and Development: The Long View," in *The Community Development Reader,* eds. James DeFillipis and Susan Saegert (London: Routledge, 2012), 30-37.

[39] Craig Willse, *The Value of Homelessness: Managing Surplus Life in the United States* (Minneapolis: Minnesota, 2015).

[40] Jane Berger, "'There Is Tragedy on Both Sides of the Layoffs:' Privatization and the Urban Crisis in Baltimore," *International Labor and Working-Class History* 71 (Spring 2007): 29-49; Claire Dunning, "New Careers for the Poor: Human Service and the Post-Industrial City," *Journal of Urban History* 44, no. 4 (2018): 669-690.

consider how state power might be reorganized in service to collective empowerment. After working to build independent neighborhood power as an organizer with the Adams Morgan Organization, Marie Nahikian took a position with the District government where she helped to develop its tenant purchase program, an initiative which facilitated the conversion of thousands of rental units to cooperative ownership. Aware their efforts to shelter the homelessness were largely a palliative, the Community for Creative Non-Violence led the formation of the Housing Now! coalition, demanding a restoration of affordable housing funding slashed by the Reagan administration. Each organization also led campaigns seeking to prevent displacement and homelessness by changing policies at the municipal level. In other words, while certain of their actions contributed to the refashioning of urban and social policy along increasingly privatized lines, organizers with New Left origins also decried the restrictions of market-based solutions and championed robust state investment as a precondition for resolving the crises faced by cities. The transition to urban neoliberalism, the study contends, was neither smooth nor unbroken, with local conditions reflecting sustained impasse more often than complete triumph.

Organizing for Racial and Urban Justice in the Nation's Capital

A resurgence of scholarship on Washington, DC over the past two decades has begun to counteract the city's under-representation in the existing urban history literature, with both its unique status as a federal city and lack of an industrial base previously leading scholars to bypass it as a site of research. Shifting the focus beyond the federal enclave, these studies have detailed how the District's Black residents fought to secure racial justice, housing rights, and democratic representation. In the process, scholars have demonstrated how these local battles both reflected and shaped wider national debates over the fates of cities and boundaries of US citizenship.

Chris Myers Asch and George Derek Musgrove's 2017 *Chocolate City: A History of Race and Democracy in the Nation's Capital* has quickly become the authoritative one-volume text on Washington's history. A sweeping 400-year survey that begins with English colonists' violent efforts to wrest control of the territory from the Nacostines, it narrates the planning and growth of the federal city, its role as an abolitionist battleground, and the dismantling of the political and civil rights briefly implemented under Reconstruction. Paying sustained attention to the era of desegregation, white suburban flight, and civil rights activism, it charts the midcentury rise of the city's Black statistical majority and efforts to establish home rule and further local control. Asch and Musgrove also situate contemporary displacement processes reshaping the city within a wider history, showing how the private revitalization of Georgetown, federally-backed clearance of Southwest DC, and gentrification of Adams Morgan and Dupont Circle prefigured the developments of past two decades. Race, they argue, has been the most salient factor shaping inequality across the city's long growth and development—including up to the present with the ongoing denial of political self-determination.[41]

*Chocolate Cit*y's extensive history of the District builds on the foundation of numerous monographs, including works examining Reconstruction Era Washington and the struggles of the formerly enslaved to secure meaningful citizenship. These studies chart the significant changes that were implemented in the wake of the Civil War, from Black male enfranchisement to the banning discrimination in office holding and jury service, and how African Americans laid claim to them while pushing for further social and economic reforms. Such measures, however, were rolled back within little more than a decade as part of the federal retreat from Reconstruction.

[41] Chris Myers Asch and George Derek Musgrove, *Chocolate City: A History of Race and Democracy in the Nation's Capital* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017).

Placing the District under the control of unelected commissioners in 1874, Congress ended local sovereignty while signaling its acquiescence to segregation nationwide.[42]

More recently, a wave of monographs have analyzed African American activism in Jim Crow era Washington, demonstrating segregation's deep entrenchment in the city and how the militant challenges residents offered to it laid the foundation for the modern civil rights movement.[43] The central role of Black women's leadership in these and other campaigns, from social reform and self-help efforts in the 1920-30s to battles to end police brutality and secure employment rights during the 1940-50s, has been the subject of multiple studies.[44] Scholars have also traced the shifting circumstances of Black workers in the federal service from the late 19th century to the mid-20th century, considering both how the conditions they faced indexed national racial politics and how their efforts to achieve equal treatment in the workplace transformed the city more broadly.[45] Everyday life in the city for African Americans in this period, both for those who formed its small but influential Black elite and the recent migrants from the South who comprised the core of its laboring classes, has further been recounted.[46]

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[42] Robert Harrison, *Washington during Civil War and Reconstruction: Race and Radicalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Kate Masur, *An Example for All the Land: Emancipation and the Struggle Over Equality in Washington, D.C.* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010). On Black women's efforts to secure freedom in the Antebellum period, see Tamika Y. Nunley, *At the Threshold of Liberty: Women, Slavery, and Shifting Identities in Washington, D.C.* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2021).
[43] Erik S. Gellman, *Death Blow to Jim Crow: The National Negro Congress and the Rise of Militant Civil Rights* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012).
[44] Treva B. Lindsey, *Colored No More: Reinventing Black Womanhood in Washington, D.C.* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2017); Mary-Elizabeth B. Murphy, *Jim Crow Capital: Women and Black Freedom Struggles in Washington, D.C., 1920-1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018); Alison M. Parker, *Unceasing Militant: The Life of Mary Church Terrell* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2020.
[45] Eric Steven Yellin, *Racism in the Nation's Service: Government Workers and the Color Line in Woodrow Wilson's America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013); Frederick Gooding, Jr., *American Dream Deferred: Black Federal Workers in Washington, D.C 1941-1981* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2018).
[46] Paula C. Austin, *Coming of Age in New Jim Crow DC: Navigating the Politics of Every Life* (New York: New York University Press, 2019); Valerie Melissa Babb, Carroll R Gibbs, and Kathleen M Lesko, *Black Georgetown Remembered: A History of Its Black Community from the Founding of the "Town of George" in 1751 to the Present Day* (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 1991); James Borchert, *Alley Life in Washington: Family, Community, Religion, and Folklife in the City, 1850-1970* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1980); Elizabeth Clark-Lewis, *Living In, Living Out: African American Domestics in Washington, D.C., 1910-1940* (Washington: Smithsonian, 1994); Jacqueline M. Moore, *Leading the Race: The Transformation of the Black Elite in the Nation's*

Chocolate City and several unpublished dissertations offer the strongest treatments available on civil rights activism in Washington and the rise of the Black majority following segregation's collapse and the corresponding white flight to the suburbs.[47] These studies—and Lauren Pearlman's *Democracy's Capital: Black Political Power in Washington, D.C. 19602-1970s* especially—narrate how emboldened organizing in the city led often by veterans of the Southern freedom struggle created a groundswell for home rule and formed an infrastructure for Black electoral power upon its arrival.[48] Pearlman's work and others, however, also consider how the Nixon administration's turn towards law and order politics curtailed their possibilities, crowding out hopes for the city's more equitable rebuilding in the wake of the 1968 riots.[49]

Histories of Black Power organizing in the city have begun to be explored over the past decade as part of the era's wider reappraisal. Digital humanities projects such as Musgrove's *Black Power in Washington, D.C. 1961-1998* story map and the SNCC Legacy Project's *Black Power Chronicles* each offer indispensable overviews of the period, providing brief descriptions of key organizations and events and oral history interviews and written remembrances from activists, respectively.[50] More extensive assessments have been written on initiatives undertaken by SNCC veterans that relocated to the city, such as their roles founding the Center for Black

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Capital, 1880-1920 (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1999); Elizabeth Dowling Taylor, *The Original Black Elite: Daniel Murphy and the Store of a Forgotten Era* (New York: Amistad, 2017).

[47] Asch and Musgrove, *Chocolate City*, 285-389; Gregory M. Borchardt, "Making D.C. Democracy's Capital: Local Activism, the 'Federal State', and the Struggle for Civil Rights in Washington, D.C.," diss., (George Washington University, 2013); Selah Johnson, ""Free D.C.:" The Struggle for Civil, Political, and Human Rights in Washington, D.C., 1965-1979," diss., (University of California, Los Angeles, 2015).

[48] Pearlman, *Democracy's Capital*.

[49] Kyla Sommers, "I Believe in the City: The Black Freedom Struggle and the 1968 Civil Disturbances in Washington, D.C.," diss., (George Washington University, 2019).

[50] George Derek Musgrove, *Black Power in Washington, D.C. 1961-1998*, 2021, https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/5e17e7d1c4a8406b9eaf26a4eae77103/; The SNCC Legacy Project, *Black Power Chronicles*, 2020, https://blackpowerchronicles.org/.

Education and Drum and Spear Bookstore and coordinating the Sixth Pan-African Congress.[51] The brief and embattled life of the Black Panther Party's DC chapter has also been chronicled.[52] Other studies have assessed how the lineage of Black Power organizing informed the creation of Pan-Africanist educational institutions or student organizing at Howard University.[53] Given the incredible upsurge of Black nationalist political and cultural projects across the District in these years, many historiographic gaps persist.

The relationships between anti-poverty, civil rights, and Black Power activism and the emergence of the radical feminist movement are treated in Anne Valk's study *Radical Sisters: Second Wave Feminism and Black Liberation in Washington, D.C.* Often vexed, the histories of these distinct organizing traditions were also deeply entangled, as Valk demonstrates.[54] Other studies have analyzed the intimate connections and matters of contention between DC's Black, LGBTQ, and Black LGBTQ communities and how the city formed an epicenter for Black gay cultural expression from the late 1970s through the early 1990s. [55] The rise of the region's largest immigrant community in these same years—and the relationships of Salvadorans to the city's pre-existing multinational Latinx population, Central American and white activists involved in the solidarity movement, and DC's Black majority—is also an area of growing examination.[56]

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[51] Russell Rickford, *We Are an African People: Independent Education, Black Power, and the Radical Imagination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016); Joshua Clark Davis, *From Head Shops to Whole Foods: The Rise and Fall of Activist Entrepreneurs* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017); Markle, *Motorcycle on Hell Run*.
[52]John Preusser, "Exceptional Headwinds: The Black Panthers in D.C.," in *The Black Panther Part in a City Near You*, ed. Judson L. Jeffries (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2018), 52-88.
[53]Michelle Coghill Chatman, "Beyond Kente Cloth and Kwanzaa: Interrogating African-Centered Identity in Washington, D.C.," diss., (American University, 2013); Myers, *We Are Worth Fighting For*.
[54] Valk, Radical Sisters.
[55] Genny Beemyn, *A Queer Capital: A History of Gay Life in Washington, D.C*. (New York: Routledge, 2015); Darius Bost, *Evidence of Being: The Black Gay Cultural Renaissance and the Politics of Violence*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019); Kwame Holmes, "Chocolate City to Rainbow City: The Dialectics of Black and Gay Community Formation in Washington, D.C., 1946-1978," diss., (University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2011).
[56] Patrick Scallen, "The Bombs that Drop in El Salvador Explode in Mount Pleasant: From Cold War Conflagration to Immigrant Struggles in Washington, DC 1970-1995." diss., (Georgetown University, 2019); Gabriella Gahlia Modan, *Turf Wars: Discourse, Diversity, and the Politics of Place* (Malden: Blackwell, 2007); Ana Patricia

Washington's status as the nation's capital and economic basis in the federal government have in the past led urbanists to treat it as an outlier whose history and development are external to that of other cities. This has begun to shift, with multiple works considering the District's role as a forerunner for national urban policy and the postindustrial transformation of cities broadly.[57] The displacement of nearly 23,000 residents in Southwest DC as part of a massive urban renewal project offered a harbinger of what was to come for other targeted neighborhoods in the US; the more participatory forms of urban redevelopment promised by the Model Cities program nearly two decades later were first piloted in Shaw.[58] The redeployment of fair housing and integration rhetoric, pursuit of historic preservation status, and selective appropriation of Black expressive culture to facilitate gentrification and displacement in the District also prefigured their adoption elsewhere.[59] Subject to federal imposition and real estate industry predation, Washingtonians have powerfully asserted their right to the city, not only protesting racialized dispossession but forging creative alternatives to it while generating ripple effects far beyond the capital.[60] The city, these projects contend, can no longer be ignored in discussions of the urban past or future.

Rodriguez, *Dividing the Isthmus: Central American Transnational Histories, Literatures, and Cultures* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009): 167-194. These studies build on a previous generation of scholarship on the rise of a multi-national Latinx community in the Washington region. See Olivia Cadaval*, Creating a Latino Identity in the Nation's Capital: The Latino Festival* (London: Routledge, 1998); Terry A. Repak, *Waiting on Washington: Central American Workers in the Nation's Capital* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995).

[57] Derek S. Hyra, *Race, Class, and Politics in the Cappuccino City* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017); Derek S. Hyra and Sabiyha Prince, eds. *Capital Dilemma: Growth and Inequality in Washington DC* (New York: Routledge, 2016).

[58] Howard Gillette, *Between Justice and Beauty: Race, Planning, and the Failure of Urban Policy in Washington, D.C.* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995).

[59] Rosemary Ndubuizu, "In the State's Shadow of Fair Housing: D.C. (White) Business Leaders and their Revanchist Desires," *Urban Affairs Review* 57, no.6 (2021), 1558-1589; Cameron Logan, *Historic Capital: Preservation, Race, and Real Estate in Washington, D.C.* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Pres, 2017); Brandi Thompson Summers, *Black in Place: The Spatial Aesthetics of Race in a Post-Chocolate City* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2019).

[60] Meghelli, *A Right the City;* Amanda Huron, *Carving Out the Commons: Tenant Organizing and Housing Cooperative in Washington, D.C.* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2018); Amanda Huron, "Struggling for Housing, from DC to Johannesburg: Washington Inner City Self Help Goes to South Africa," in *Capital Dilemma*, 86-106.

This project contributes to and advances the growing conversation on Washington, DC's history in several respects. Through offering detailed portraits of the Black Land Movement and the D.C. Statehood Party, the study expands our understanding of the multiple ways organizers in the District envisioned self-determination in the Black Power era and the range of strategies they undertook to pursue it. In the process, it assesses how the city's sizeable Black population, distinct status, and oversight from federal agencies and legislators shaped activists' perceptions of Black Power and its aims.

MICCO's attempts to infuse citizen participation in the urban renewal process in Shaw have been the subject of several studies.[61] Neither its critics nor the alternative proposals they put forward for the neighborhood's rebuilding in the wake of the 1968 uprising have been given a closer look, however, obscuring the diverse and at times contrasting ways that Black activists sought to wield the tools of urban planning. There are several reasons for this, from the limited reach of the Black Land Movement in realizing its plans for the surrounding area to the lack of a readily identifiable and easily accessible archive related to the organization. Sitting with the evidence that is available, however, illuminates how Black Power cadre in the nation's capital advanced bold visions of territorial autonomy not unlike those then emerging in Detroit, Harlem, or Newark at the time, this despite being just blocks from the White House. It further illustrates the longer lineage of grassroots development activism in the city and how federally-backed redevelopment plans have been refused, renegotiated, and reimagined by Black residents.

Even as Julius Hobson's activism and its effective fusion of publicity-grabbing stunts and reams of statistical research have been amply recounted in recent scholarship, the D.C. Statehood Party he co-led over the last portion of his life has not, consigned to a few paragraphs or passing

[61] Gillette, *From Justice to Beauty*; Sommers, "I Believe in the City"; Holmes, "Chocolate City to Rainbow City."

mention in accounts of early home rule era politics or the wider quest for DC statehood.[62] As a result, how statehood's early advocates positioned it as part of a much longer struggle for social reconstruction has been sidelined. For Hobson and other party leaders such as Josephine Butler and Hilda Mason, political self-determination for the predominantly Black city was the first step towards building a democratic and socialist District that offered a robust municipal alternative to the rising national politics of white backlash. Too easily dismissed as a marginal political force, narrating the party's daily efforts and the transformative agenda that anchored them conveys a clearer picture of how activists sought to take advantage of the opportunities home rule provided even as they contested its limits. It also draws out the distinctions between the Democratic Party and its incremental approach to improving the city's status and more fundamental assertions of the right to self-governance which situate it as an unfinished goal of the Black freedom struggle.

The Adams Morgan Organization and Community for Creative Non-Violence's respective campaigns to challenge gentrification and create shelters have each been the subject of articles and dissertations.[63] Extending from this research and exploring under-addressed themes within the existing literature, the approach taken here offers a representative overview of each

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[62] Asch and Musgrove, *Chocolate City*; Pearlman, *Democracy's Capital*; George Derek Musgrove, ""Statehood is Far More Difficult": The Struggle for D.C. Self-Determination, 1980–2017," *Washington History* 29, no.2 (2017): 3-17.

[63] On aspects of the Adams Morgan Organization's campaigns, see: Chris Myers Asch and George Derek Musgrove, "We are Headed for Some Bad Trouble: Gentrification and Displacement in Washington, DC, 1920-2014," in *Capital Dilemma*, 107-135; Amanda Huron, "Creating a Commons in the Capital: The Emergence of Limited Equity Cooperatives in Washington, D.C.," *Washington History* 26, no. 2 (2014): 56-67; Amanda Huron, "Caring in Public: The Struggle for Community Park West," *Washington History* 33, no. 1 (2021): 26-34; James Lloyd, "Fighting Redlining and Gentrification in Washington, D.C.: The Adams-Morgan Organization and Tenant Right to Purchase," *The Journal of Urban History* 42, no. 6 (2016): 1091-1109; Katie J. Wells, "A Housing Crisis, a Failed Law, and a Property Conflict: The US Urban Speculation Tax," *Antipode* 47, no. 4 (2015): 1043-1061. On aspects of the Community for Creative Non-Violence's campaigns, see: Christine Elwell, "From Political Protest to Bureaucratic Service: The Transformation of Homeless Advocacy in the Nation's Capital and the Eclipse of Political Discourse," diss. (American University, 2008); Nicole M. Gipson, "Making the Third Ghetto: Race, Gender, and Family Homelessness in Washington, DC, 1977-1989," *Journal of American Studies* 56, no. 5 (2022): 699-728; Katie. J. Wells, "Policy-failing: a repealed right to shelter," *Urban Geography* 41, no. 9 (2020): 1139-1157. CCNV has also been the subject of a recent digital and community-based humanities project. See Dan Kerr, curator, *Resistance and Revolution: The Struggle to End Homelessness in the Nation's Capital*, The Humanities Truck, American University, https://humanitiestruck.com/allexhibits/resistance-revolution/.

group's history that considers its ideological groundings alongside the campaigns it undertook and multiple issues it sought to address. The project also situates each organization in relation to three broader dynamics. First, it relays the New Left matrix of activism and cultural production in which they emerged and how that shaped their analyses and objectives. Second, it locates their multi-racial and predominantly white organizing bases, respectively, within the wider context of a majority-Black city and the shifting processes of racial formation. Third, it considers how their proximity to federal policymakers affected the course of urban and social policy nationally.

Surveying the Adams Morgan Organization over the course of its dozen years elucidates several underexplored aspects of the city's history. Amid its stark absence, citizens of the District sought out multiple ways to express democracy. Often emerging from a radical milieu—such as the New Left countercultures that permeated Adams Morgan—these participatory experiments in turn shaped the expectations that residents brought to home rule, including their support for the establishment of advisory neighborhood commissions.[64] The group's battle against gentrification and displacement in their racially and economically heterogenous neighborhood highlights how the city developed unevenly, with real estate capital flooding into certain blocks even as broad swaths of the District were starved for investment, and how these speculative patterns were structured by anti-Blackness. Further, following their campaigns demonstrates how the city's residents were not only on the receiving end of federal urban policy but also helped to reshape it. Their efforts to interrupt speculation on Seaton Street and redirect investment towards the needs of long-term residents took them before the Federal Home Loan Bank Board in Atlanta and were

[64] The Lessons of the Sixties project, an initiative sponsored by the Institute for Policy Studies whose materials are housed at George Washington University's Special Collections Research Center, has preserved oral histories of New Left participants, many of whom lived and organized within Adams Morgan and the Surrounding neighborhoods. See *Lessons of the Sixties: A History of Local Washington, D.C. Activism for Peace and Justice*, Institute for Policy Studies, 2019, https://lessonsofthesixties.wixsite.com/lessonsofthesixties.

featured prominently at Senate hearings on discriminatory lending practices and displacement, contributing to the emergence of the Community Reinvestment Act. In these ways and others, the Adams Morgan Organization's reach extended far beyond their 300-acre neighborhood.

Contextualizing the rise and evolution of the Community for Creative Non-Violence within the wider history of Washington brings to the fore multiple elements. The city's rich legacy of progressive religious activism—and how a generation of New Left radicals sought to reinvent dominant religious traditions and reimagine everyday spiritual practice in light of the era's social upheavals—has barely been discussed, despite a growing concern for these themes within urban historiography.[65] The group's campaigns responding to the dramatic expansion of homelessness in the District call attention to how austerity at the federal level—and its disparate impact along racial lines—undercut the early promise of the Barry administration, challenging the still popular myth that the city's wounds in the 1980s and 1990s were chiefly self-inflicted.[66] At the same time, they demonstrate how the city's political leaders adapted to this new terrain, often placing them out of step not only with the goals of activists but the sentiments of its Black working class majority.[67] The group's confrontations with the Reagan administration over the federal government's role in providing shelter, and the passage of the McKinney Act that their takeover of Federal City Shelter spurred, confirm the role of local battles in the transformation of

[65] Sean T. Dempsey, *City of Dignity: Christianity, Liberalism, and the Making of Global Los Angeles* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2023); Tracy E. K'Meyer, *To Live Peaceably Together: The American Friends Service Committee's Campaign for Open Housing* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2022); Mark Wild, *Renewal: Liberal Protestants and the American City after World War II* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2019).
[66] This is the general impression left by *Dream City*, a popular book on the Barry era by two white local reporters. As a 'first draft of history' it missed much of the wider national frame and its character-driven narrative is often sensationalist in tone. See Harry S. Jaffe and Tom Sherwood, *Dream City: Race, Power, and the Decline of Washington, D.C.* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994).
[67] On Black urban regimes in the neoliberal era, see Adolph Reed, *Stirrings in the Jug: Black Politics in the Post-Segregation Era* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999); John Arena, "Bringing in the Black Working Class: The Black Urban Regime Strategy," *Science & Society* 75, no. 2 (2011): 153-179; Akira Drake Rodriguez, *Diverging Space for Deviants: The Politics of Atlanta's Public Housing* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2021).

urban governance nationwide. Tracing the long arc of the Community for Creative Non-Violence also begins to throw light on a period in the city's history that warrants much closer inspection.

Through each of these ways, "Counter-Capital" seeks to move forward the discussion on Washington, DC, the organizers that have fought to make it a more equitable city, and the ways their campaigns have reverberated beyond the Potomac. In dialogue with the work of Asch and Musgrove, Pearlman, and Valk, the project builds on the foundation they each provide while addressing some of their omissions and offering more extended analyses in certain instances. Doing so enables a more comprehensive understanding of how social movements shaped life in the nation's capital and sought to advance the autonomy of its residents and how processes of racialization informed the campaigns that DC's activists pursued and their different trajectories.

Chapter Overview

Chapter 1

Chapter one "A Nation Must Begin Somewhere": The Black Land Movement and the Struggle for Self-Determination in the Era of Urban Renewal chronicles the history of the Black Land Movement and its campaigns between 1969-1973, situating them within the upsurge of Black Power organizing nationally and locally. Formed amidst the impasses of federal War on Poverty and urban renewal initiatives, the group contested both the terms of the Shaw neighborhood's redevelopment and the meaning of community control through a variety of strategies, including autonomous urban planning, base building, cooperative enterprise, youth development, electoral politics, and print media. These organizing initiatives, premised on the conviction that collective land ownership was central to the realization of Black self-determination, often blurred the lines between Black capitalist and socialist approaches. They also revealed both the possibilities and limits of a politics defined by self-reliance. Through their

biweekly newspaper *Black Land News*, the group updated the wider community on their campaigns and took part in national debates about the direction of the Black freedom struggle during a pivotal moment. Like other efforts to render Black Power in concrete, its vision of a territorially liberated Shaw went largely unrealized, running aground against the realities of institutional politics and inadequate resources. Its concerns about both the cooptation of Black reformers and displacement from the central city, however, would be proven prescient.

Chapter 2

Chapter two "The Power to Control Our Lives and Our City": The D.C. Statehood Party and the Quest for Social Democratic Self-Government in 'The Last Colony' examines the rise of the D.C. Statehood Party and its bid to link local self-determination to broader societal transformation in the 1970-80s. Emerging at the intersection of Black Power struggles and the antiwar movement, it sought to form "a majority party for the dispossessed" in the District capable of translating street protest into state policy. Shaped initially by Julius Hobson's outsized persona and singular political vision, the party further distinguished itself from the city's Democratic consensus through its unwavering demand for statehood. The implementation of home rule in 1974, the limits of which the party persistently protested, at the same time gave the party a broader stage, with Hobson claiming a seat on the inaugural elected council. Its attempt to pursue radical change through the electoral arena registered the challenges of creating a viable coalition across distinct issues and identities along with the difficulties that confronted third-party candidates in a one-party town. Hobson's extended illness and early death in 1977 prompted new leaders to emerge; at the same time the party was beset by conflict and struggled to maintain its political dynamism. The groundwork laid by the party ultimately led to a citywide

referendum on statehood in 1980 and constitutional convention two years later, with the city's Black voters conveying their support for both statehood and robust social democracy.

Chapter 3

Chapter three "People Should Participate in Every Decision Affecting Their Lives": The Adams Morgan Organization and the Fight for Neighborhood Control over Redevelopment charts the emergence and evolution of the Adams Morgan Organization and its efforts to enact neighborhood autonomy as a countervailing force to displacement in the 1970-80s. With the motto "Unity in Diversity," the group created a multiracial and multilingual assembly as a forum for democratic decision-making in the years prior to home rule, inspiring the Advisory Neighborhood Commission structure that was established with its ratification. Acting as a catalyst for alternative paths of development in DC, its project committees brought residents together around environmental beautification, youth recreation, cooperative economic enterprise, and sustainable food and technology experiments. By the mid-1970s, such projects were largely eclipsed by urgent campaigns to prevent the displacement of longtime residents, secure the passage of a citywide land speculation tax, and wrest community reinvestment from a local bank with a history of redlining. While often remarkably successful in their organizing, long-term neighborhood outcomes revealed the limited ability of local groups to safeguard their communities from of real estate capital's predatory reach. Lessons first learned in the streets of Adams Morgan, though, were put to use on a larger scale, informing the creation of the city's tenant purchase program and the evolution of community development strategies nationally.

Chapter 4

Chapter four "We Cannot Live with the Administration Saying it has No Responsibility": The Community for Creative Non-Violence and the Battle for Shelter Against Austerity assesses

the Community for Creative Non-Violence and its campaigns to create a caring city and society amidst the consolidation of urban neoliberalism. Formed in 1970 by radical Catholics committed to hastening the war in Vietnam's end, the group turned their attention to the sharply rising rates of homelessness in the city later that decade. Forcing the federal and local governments to face the crisis through protest encampments, hunger strikes, and public funerals for those who died from exposure, the group won repeat concessions from the Reagan and Barry administrations, each of which were reluctant to claim responsibility for their most vulnerable citizens. While pressing the federal government to finance its model emergency shelter, CCNV worked simultaneously to cement a legal right to shelter within the city, which it accomplished through the passage of Initiative 17 in 1984. Wresting funds for the shelter's completion, CCNV also helped secure the passage of the McKinney Act, a bill which provided federal funding for emergency shelters programs and related services. Their efforts to expand affordable housing production through the Housing Now! coalition were markedly less successful, signaling the ambiguous nature of what their direct action tactics and mutual aid efforts had achieved. By the 1990s, the emergency shelter they built had become a permanent fixture of the city's landscape.

Epilogue

A brief epilogue sketched key events in the years that immediately followed, including how the establishment of a Financial Control Board by Congress in 1995 addressed the city's budget deficits while stripping its legislative powers and binding its future more tightly to the pursuit of private development. Vigorously courting new residents, the policies of the Anthony Williams (1999-2007) and Adrian Fenty (2007-2011) administrations accelerated cycles of gentrification in the District, a process that led ultimately to the loss of its Black statistical majority in 2011. The consolidation of the city's community development and nonprofit direct

service sectors in these same decades—and their inability to substantively challenge residential displacement and its racialized contours—in turn gave rise to a new generation of grassroots, Black-led organizations committed to fostering visions of landed self-determination.

Chapter 1

"A Nation Must Begin Somewhere": The Black Land Movement and the Struggle for Self-Determination in the Era of Urban Renewal

> Black people do not own the land we live on. This is important. Land is central to ownership and power. Every war that is fought (including in Vietnam) is fought over land. We have been pushed around from one urban renewal project to the other basically because we never owned the land.
>
> That is why the black struggle has come to land. We have gone through emancipation. We have fought for desegregation and gone through Civil Rights. We have integrated, picketed, and boycotted to no avail. We must have land.
>
> We must have power if we are to survive. Power can only come to Black people if they control land. The Black Land Movement is a dedication to this concept. Black Land believes that all of the other movements that have carried black people on the tides of history have been educational. Now, we must act out a new direction. The control of land. Black Land.[1]

Prominently displayed in the window of its small storefront office and regularly reprinted in its newspaper, the manifesto of the Black Land Movement (BLM) announced a mission at once brief and outrageously bold. It was time, it asserted, for the Black liberation struggle to enter a new phase. If Black people were to have power—real power—they needed an independent base. They needed land. In the words of the organization's 26-year-old chairman Bill Street, "Black people are in the process of building a nation, and a nation must begin somewhere." For Street and his co-founders, there was no better place to start than Shaw, a 675-acre area in Northwest Washington targeted for urban renewal. Home to 45,000 residents, the majority of whom were Black and poor, the neighborhood was at risk of becoming "a redeveloped community-colony" that enriched white "land grabbers" while forcing out thousands. Another path, however, was possible—if an admittedly arduous one. By building the Black Land Movement and creating a

[1] "Why LAND?" *Black Land News*, May 1, 1971, Microfilm P00-22 DN99-1077, Wisconsin Historical Society Library.

community-controlled and cooperatively-owned Shaw, organizers contended, "together we can begin to shape not only our immediate environment, but the very destiny of our people."[2]

Throughout the 1960-70s, the "land question" seized the imaginations of intellectuals and organizers across multiple strands of Black radicalism. Revolutionary secessionists, Third World Marxists, and cultural nationalists each turned to the land as the locus of power and possibility. Inspired by the speeches of Malcolm X and writings of Frantz Fanon earlier that decade, a broad range of Black activists viewed territorial autonomy as both a prerequisite to self-determination and a powerful rhetorical device for inveighing against the limits of civil rights legislation and integrationist approaches. The projects they undertook varied in their scale, idealized location, envisioned political economy, and relative antagonism to existing US state structures. Common across them, however, was a political and cultural analysis that analogized Black America as an informal and intentionally underdeveloped colony that required national liberation.[3]

Founded in 1969, BLM shared the conviction that land was central to the realization of Black self-determination. Its location in an urban renewal area a mile from the White House, however, led the group to develop distinct analytical formations and organizing strategies in pursuit of this vision. Defying neat categorization, BLM's multi-faceted approach to advancing Black autonomy brought together urban planning, base building, cooperative enterprise, youth development, electoral politics, and print media. Offering a trenchant critique of federally funded anti-poverty and urban renewal programs and their inherent contradictions, the group sought to radically reshape community and urban development as instruments of Black liberation.

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[2] Bill Street, "Editorial," *Black Land News*, December 1969, Box 1, Folder 42, Youth Pride Inc. Records, Moorland Spingarn Research Center, Howard University; "Why LAND?" *Black Land News*, May 1, 1971; Otis Daniels, "Urbanization in Shaw," *Black Land News*, May 1, 1971.

[3] Russell Rickford, "'We Can't Grow Food on All This Concrete': The Land Question, Agrarianism, and Black Nationalist Thought in the Late 1960s and 1970s," *Journal of American History* 103, no. 4 (2017): 956–80.

This chapter retraces the history of the Black Land Movement and its campaigns between 1969-1973, situating them within the upsurge of Black Power organizing nationally and locally. Formed amidst the impasses of federal War on Poverty and urban renewal initiatives, the group contested both the terms of Shaw's redevelopment and the meaning of community control, with the aim of forging an alternative model of urban development for an ascendant Black nation. Asserting a collectivist agenda that often blurred the lines between Black capitalist and socialist approaches, its campaigns demonstrated both the possibilities and the limits of a politics defined by self-reliance. BLM's biweekly newspaper *Black Land News* indexed both its evolving organizational life and the searching nature of the Black freedom movement during the period, including a rapidly shifting understanding of cultural production and gendered politics. The group's persistent focus on urban planning bolstered Black radical land-as-freedom discourses, and its concerns about the cooptation of struggle and widespread displacement from Shaw would each be proven prescient. Like similar other efforts in other cities, BLM's vision went largely unrealized, and its political and economic strategy raised more questions than it could resolve. Revisiting BLM and its initiatives, though, illustrates how DC's activists sought to render Black Power in concrete and the broader scales of liberation they brought to these local campaigns.

Official Limits: Anti-Poverty and Urban Renewal Initiatives in 1960s Washington

The collapse of legal segregation in the 1950s led to a swift and dramatic transformation of Washington's population, with waves of white households leaving the city for the Virginia and Maryland suburbs. Comprising just over a third of District residents in 1950, the city's African American population surpassed the 50% mark in 1957. Ongoing barriers to middle class employment and the regular arrival of migrants from the South meant the city was fast becoming poorer as well. As the nation's capital and the first major city with a Black majority, Washington

instantiated midcentury white anxiety about urban decline. The city became the target of multiple social and urban policy interventions throughout the 1960s, further aided by its status as a federal district that lacked democratic representation. The calls for citizen participation these federal programs elicited, the administrative fragmentation they fostered, and their limited ability to deliver on promises of material uplift would each further strengthen Black demands for self-determination by the decade's end.

Founded in 1962 with substantial grants from the Ford and Meyer Foundations, the United Planning Organization emerged as a product of President Kennedy's Commission on Juvenile Delinquency and Youth Crime. Its initial aim was to develop youth employment retention and crime deterrence strategies that drew on social-scientific expertise, piloting with private funds programs that could then be implemented nationally. Following the passage of the Economic Opportunity Act in 1964—the legislative centerpiece of President Johnson's call for a War on Poverty—UPO was designated as the city's official Community Action Agency (CAA). This shift led to a massive influx of federal funding and multiple new initiatives; by 1965 UPO had a $21 million budget and over a thousand staff on its payroll.[4]

Structured to elude recalcitrant state and local governments, the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) financed designated action agencies directly, who were then expected to pass through funds to local nonprofit organizations or develop their own anti-poverty initiatives. In Washington UPO combined these approaches, funding pre-existing groups such as Friendship House, the Southeast Settlement House, and the local Urban League affiliate; at the same time, they launched their own sprawling network of neighborhood service centers. At its height in

[4] Chris Myers Asch and George Derek Musgrove, *Chocolate City: A History of Race and Democracy in the Nation's Capital* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 347. On the deployment of the social sciences in the development of War on Poverty policy, see Alice O'Connor, *Poverty Knowledge: Social Science, Social Policy, and the Poor in Twentieth-Century U.S. History* (Princeton: Princeton, 2001), 166-195.

1966, UPO had over 60 neighborhood centers and 30 affiliate programs within its purview, the majority of which were concentrated in lower-income Black areas in the Southeast, Northeast, and near Northwest sections of the city. UPO's neighborhood centers provided a plethora of services related to employment, housing, healthcare, education, consumer rights, legal support, and families and children. Black women played a critical role in the delivery of these programs, comprising a significant portion of UPO's frontline staff. [5]

Central to the OEO's Community Action Program was the call for "the maximum feasible participation" of the poor in the programs intended to assist them. Beyond providing services, UPO centers were tasked with aiding the development of community organizations, semi-independent citizen groups that could advocate for themselves. A number of centers, especially those outside UPO's administrative hierarchy, quickly evolved into hubs of agitation. Friendship House and Southeast House became hotbeds of welfare rights activism, with OEO-funded organizers working alongside AFDC recipients to expand eligibility and benefits. Program participants would form the Washington Welfare Alliance in 1966. Others affiliated with Southeast House established the Barry Farm Band of Angels, a tenant council whose demonstrations forced the public housing authority to undertake extensive renovations.[6]

The raucous tactics of UPO-funded organizers regularly placed them in conflict with local officials, a fact not lost on the agency's critics in Congress. Segregationists on the House Committee on the District of Columbia pummeled the agency, claiming it was bankrolling Black

[5] "Directory of United Planning Organization's Operation and Affiliate Programs," 1966, Washingtoniana Vertical File Index: Antipoverty Programs: United Planning Organization (UPO), The People's Archive, DC Public Library. On the role of women within UPO and UPO-funded agencies, see Anne M. Valk, *Radical Sisters: Second-Wave Feminism and Black Liberation in Washington, D.C.* (Urbana: Illinois, 2008), 26-37.
[6] Asch and Musgrove, *Chocolate City*, 348-49; Valk, *Radical Sisters*, 28-32; Pearlman, *Democracy's Capital*, 38-43. On the ways organizers across the country drew on OEO funding while disrupting local power structures, see Annelise Orleck and Lisa Gayle Hazirjian, eds., *The War on Poverty: A New Grassroots History, 1964-1980* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2011).

militants and communists and should be defunded. By 1967, UPO's detractors extended beyond these usual suspects. Articles in *The Washington Post* and *The Evening Star* routinely detailed the conflicts that roiled its unwieldy 54-member board of directors, with representatives of the poor fighting for an equal seat at the table and racial tensions barely beneath the surface. Columnists contended that UPO was wasteful and ineffective, citing its inability to rehabilitate any units of housing in two years or substantively "reach the most hard-core youths," and called for the anti-poverty program to be reorganized under the District government. On top of these problems, UPO was staring down impending budget cuts of 20% or more—a setback it shared with CAAs nationwide just a few years after the War on Poverty was first sounded. [7]

Sharing the War on Poverty's emphasis on citizen participation, Housing and Urban Development (HUD) officials sought to pilot a new style of urban renewal in the District, one that would avoid the immense backlash generated by the razing of whole neighborhoods. Over the previous decade the National Capital Planning Commission (NCPC) and Redevelopment Land Agency (RLA) had done just that, leveling the mostly Black neighborhood of Southwest and replacing it with master-planned apartments meant to draw back the white middle class. In the process nearly all of Southwest's 23,00 residents were displaced to other parts of the city. Due largely to the organized power of the civil rights movement and widespread rise of urban rebellions, such an approach had become increasingly untenable by the mid-1960s.[8]

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[7] "Broyhill Says Radicals Run UPO, Pride," *The Washington Post,* Nov 09, 1967; Carol Honsa, "UPO Facing Major Challenges as Antipoverty Dreams Fade," *The Washington Post,* Oct 31, 1967; Carol Honsa, "Cut in UPO Budget Threatens Staffs of Neighborhood Units," *The Washington Post,* Dec 03, 1966; William Raspberry, "Successor to Banks Risks Reputation," *The Washington Post,* May 19, 1967.

[8] Asch and Musgrove, *Chocolate City*, 320-25; Gillette, Jr., *Between Justice & Beauty: Race, Planning, and the Failure of Urban Policy in Washington, D.C.* (Philadelphia: Penn, 1995), 173-77; On the immense backlash to the urban renewal programs of the 1950s, see Christopher Klemek, *The Transatlantic Collapse of Urban Renewal: Postwar Urbanism from New York to Berlin* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

Federal and local officials found a partner in civil rights activist Rev. Walter Fauntroy. The pastor of New Bethel Baptist Church and a prominent member of King's Southern Christian Leadership Conference, Fauntroy was on record as a fierce critic of the Southwest experience. Hindered efforts to build affordable housing near his church, however, convinced him that urban renewal's powerful tools of land acquisition were necessary to combat absentee landlords and overcome artificially high lot prices. Fauntroy and NCPC and RLA staff soon began to discuss a new kind of urban renewal project that would proceed through community input and emphasize rehabilitation and a right to remain over demolition and displacement.[9]

Quickly approved by HUD, the newly designated urban renewal area corresponded with the enrollment boundaries of Shaw Junior High School, which education activists rechristened 'Shameful Shaw' due to its deplorable conditions. The surrounding neighborhood, known then simply as MidCity, took on the name Shaw in time as well. With deteriorated and overcrowded housing stock, inferior yet overpriced groceries and retail goods, and high rates of violent crime and policy brutality, Shaw typified the ghetto and its predations. To many observers, Fauntroy included, the neighborhood appeared destined for conflagration.[10]

Hoping to avert such an outcome, Fauntroy announced the formation of MICCO—the Model Inner City Community Organization—alongside a group of ministers, business leaders, and community advocates at an April 1966 press conference. Backed by a coalition of 150 civic associations, churches, and local groups, MICCO's mission was to build consensus among the area's 45,000 residents and coordinate plans for its physical, social, and economic renewal in

[9] Gillette, *Between Justice & Beauty*, 173-77.
[10] Asch and Musgrove, *Chocolate City*, 354.

partnership with federal agencies. As a starting point, it would administer public participation in the site selection process for a new Shaw Junior High School on behalf of RLA.[11]

In March of 1967, MICCO's campaign of "Renewal with the people, by the people, for the people" was officially launched with a parade and rally featuring Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. as its keynote speaker. Calling the Shaw plan "the most massive and comprehensive assault on slums initiated in this country," King enjoined the crowd to "prepare to participate" while subtly pressuring the federal government to stay the course. While already touted as an official partner on the project, MICCO had yet to receive the bulk of its funding for coordinating citizen participation. The full scope of its role, further, remained undetermined. Holding public hearings and gathering feedback was one thing; creating the new plans for the neighborhood was another. At each new stage, MICCO would have to appeal to RLA or apply for funding from HUD. After months of uncertainty, it received the contract to develop the concept plans in September and began assembling a cadre of Black architects, planners, and construction engineers.[12]

MICCO's growing influence did not go unchallenged. Throughout 1966-1967 a number of rival urban renewal organizations formed in Shaw, including several affiliated with UPO and Urban League operated centers. These groups included CRUST (Community Rehabilitation Under Security and Trust), CURAC (Community Urban Renewal Action Council), and SPUR (Shaw People's Urban Renewal). CRUST and SPUR charged that the housing being planned for the area would ultimately displace residents due to the wide gap between current and projected future rents. CURAC assailed MICCO's claims to represent the community, citing its board's

[11] Reginald Griffith, "The Influence of Meaningful Citizen Participation on the 'Urban Renewal' Process and the Renewal of the Inner-City's Black Community," thesis, (Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1969), 62-63.
[12] John Carmody, "Dr. King Pushes Shaw-Area Renewal," *The Washington Post,* Mar 13, 1967; Samir Meghelli, Curator, "Shaw: With the People, By The People, For the People," *A Right the City,* Smithsonian Anacostia Museum, 2020, https://storymaps.arcgis.com/collections/34d99cccb2c5454da7b4f08e482c1987?item=4.

bias towards the Black business and ministerial elite and inclusion of non-residents. Each also argued they were in a stronger position to reach the poor and unorganized than MICCO.[13]

The anti-poverty focused UPO also set up its own planning unit in Shaw in an attempt to shape the final RLA-approved plans. Based at Neighborhood Development Center (NDC) #1, the unit acted as a liaison between Shaw residents, UPO staff, and community groups such as CURAC, working with them to coalesce their demands for the redevelopment process. Headed by recent Howard architecture grad and advocacy planner Bill Street, the planning team worked independently from MICCO's citizen participation structures, which it denounced as a rubber stamp for decisions made downtown. Asserting that "MICCO can't speak for the people of Shaw when it works for the RLA," Street and his colleagues pursued a more oppositional approach to the federal planning agencies.[14]

Firing back in the press, Fauntroy opined that "UPO doesn't understand who the enemy is—it's not the public agencies, it's the slumlords." MICCO's critics, he contended, wasted time attacking the group that would be better spent fighting speculators or involving residents in the renewal process. MICCO planners also stressed the need to balance competing neighborhood voices, claiming that while UPO and its affiliates were "concerned only with poor people, we're concerned with *all* the people in Shaw." Behind the scenes, MICCO staff charged that UPO feared competition from more efficient and effective groups such as their own and that its attacks stemmed from efforts to preserve the agency's 'turf' and the funding that came with it.[15]

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[13] Richard Severo, "Group Challenges Shaw Housing Plan," *The Washington Post,* May 14, 1966; Jerome S. Paige and Margaret M. Reuss, *Safe, Decent, and Affordable: Citizen Struggles to Improve Housing in the District of Columbia, 1890-1982* (Washington: University of the District of Columbia, 1983), 22-24; Griffith, "Meaningful Citizen Participation," 59-61. On the "reproductive futurism" of MICCO and the sexual politics of its vision for Shaw's redevelopment, see Kwame Holmes, "Chocolate City to Rainbow City: The Dialectics of Black and Gay Community Formation in Washington, D.C., 1946-1978," diss., (University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2011).
[14] Ellen Perry Berkley, "A New Voice in Renewal," *Architectural Forum*, November 1967, 75.
[15] Ibid.; Griffith, "Meaningful Citizen Participation," 59, 65.

Further complicating the conflict over Shaw's redevelopment and who would lead it, the District was awarded a Model Cities planning grant in November 1967. The boundaries of the new HUD-approved 'Model Neighborhood' overlapped with the Shaw urban renewal area while stretching farther east. As a condition of receiving the funds, the city was required to create both an overarching redevelopment agency and an oversight commission composed of demonstration area residents. Announced by Mayor Walter Washington in March 1968, the 29-member Model Cities Commission and 140-member Ward Councils were to be elected the following fall. [16]

MICCO, UPO, and the Model Cities agency were now operating in the same section of the city, each funded by federal dollars and claiming a similar mandate. Diluting the authority of all three groups, this fragmentation aided the suspicion of many Shaw residents that little would come of the much-touted renewal. The embattled status of anti-poverty efforts and aid to cities in Congress—combined with Johnson's surprise announcement that he would not seek reelection—reinforced apprehensions that Washington's war on urban despair was already faltering.

"The Message is Clear": The 1968 Riots and the Turn to Community Control

On the night of April 4, 1968, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was cut down by an assassin's bullet while standing on the balcony of a Memphis motel. Within hours riots broke out in over a hundred U.S. cities; by midnight the streets of Washington were in flames. The four-day uprising that followed was finally quelled by sweeping arrests and the deployment of 13,000 troops—the largest military occupation of a US city since the Civil War. In the end thirteen people lay dead and over 1,800 buildings in the city's Black commercial corridors were destroyed. While federal officials and the *Post* condemned the arson and looting as a senseless descent into lawlessness, Black residents testified at subsequent hearings that the unrest was decades in the making, driven

[16] Robert G. Kaiser, "Model City Grant Goes To District," *The Washington Post,* Nov 17, 1967; Robert G. Kaiser, "Model Cities Program is Unveiled," *The Washington Post,* Mar 5, 1968.

by longstanding patterns of police violence and economic exclusion as much King's murder. [17]

For a number of Black activists in Washington, April fourth marked a turning point from which there would be no going back. Stokely Carmichael, who had recently returned to the city to form the Black United Front, declared at a press conference the next morning that "When white America killed Dr. King last night she declared war on us…There no longer needs to be intellectual discussion. Black people know that they have to get guns." Casting the assassination of King as the final death knell for nonviolent change, the charismatic former SNCC chairman and public face of Black Power warned of impending retribution in the streets.

The Johnson administration moved quickly to neutralize the activist and his message, deploying a tactic it had utilized the year before against fellow SNCC member H. Rap Brown. On April 11 the Department of Justice (DOJ) and Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) announced they would investigate Carmichael's role in inciting the riots. The night of King's death Carmichael had led a crowd on U St. demanding businesses close out of respect for the slain leader; it soon grew out of control despite his pleas for individual restraint. Despite the circumstances of the night being widely known, FBI spokesmen conjectured that Carmichael's actions may have been part of a pre-planned conspiracy. Due to an anti-riot provision in the recently passed D.C. Crime Bill a conviction could carry a maximum sentence of 10 years. An indictment alone could tie Carmichael up in criminal proceedings for a year or more.[18]

Grasping for evidence of conspiracy, the FBI and OEO investigated claims that UPO staff in Shaw had engaged in "militant organizational activities" during the riots. Among the

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[17] Pearlman, *Democracy's Capital*, 79-89; Samuel J. Walker, *Most of 14th Street Is Gone: The Washington, DC Riots of 1968* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018).
[18] "The City's Turmoil: The Night it Began," *The Washington Post,* April 14, 1968; "We're not Afraid…We're Gonna Die for Our People," *The Washington Post,* April 6, 1968; "U.S. Probing Carmichael's Role in Riot," *The Washington Post,* April 12, 1968; Pearlman, *Democracy's Capital*, 89-94.

rumors was that members of the NDC #1 planning unit, who were known to be involved in SNCC, has used the anti-poverty center as a base for guerilla training. While the claims were quickly found to have no basis, Street argued that the probe had served its intended purpose. Writing in the CURAC newspaper *Shaw's Last Stand* under the pen name "Bill Boulevard," Street charged that "as the reports of collusion grow, so does the decreased attention concerning the cause of the rebellions." Refuting speculation that the destruction along 7th St. was planned, Street concluded that "the lies the Man will spread about what and who caused the rebellions will not be sufficient to withstand the mass emergence of a new era – Black nationalism." What the past week's events proved, Street asserted, was that Black people were cohering as one.[19]

Amidst this charged atmosphere CURAC sent a telegram to President Johnson, Mayor Washington, and the agency heads of HUD, OEO, RLA, and UPO, declaring that "The Black Community has spoken...The message is clear. We will make the decisions about our community. We will run our neighborhood." The terse dispatch demanded guaranteed income, work, and adequate interim housing for area residents along with community control over schools, the police, and other institutions. Contending "we will reject any programs, plans, or approaches to our community unless they meet our basic objectives and standards," CURAC called for a halt to anti-poverty programs and planning surveys in Shaw until "their relevance and meaning [are] determined by the community." In self-initiating "urban renewal on a crash scale," the Black community has shown that it will no longer supplicate outside forces. [20]

Between being the target of an FBI investigation and actively participating in CURAC's insurrection, UPO leadership had had enough with NDC #1. The agency moved to restructure the

[19] "OEO Probes Militancy in Shaw Area," *The Washington Post,* Jul 16, 1968; Bill Boulevard (Bill Street), "After the Riots: The New Lie," *Shaw's Last Stand*, May 1968, Box 38, Shaw School Site Selection Working Papers File, Department of Housing and Community Development Library Records, District of Columbia Archives.
[20] "CURAC SPEAKS!," *Shaw's Last Stand*, May 1968.

Shaw center's staff early the following week, beginning with the dismantling of the planning unit. Ordered to relocate to the central planning office downtown, Street refused and was fired for insubordination on April 15. As word of Street's dismissal and the breakup of the NDC #1 team spread throughout UPO's sprawling staff, many came to view the actions of agency leadership as both a betrayal of Black unity and a rebuke of Black Power radicalism. Already concerned that UPO was deemphasizing community action in favor of direct service under new director Wiley Branton, a contingent felt the agency was fast becoming irrelevant.[21]

On April 18, 300 UPO staffers responded by overtaking the agency's executive offices. During what was variously reported by the press as a work stoppage, unauthorized staff meeting, or a revolt, the anti-poverty workers upbraided the War on Poverty program as an obstacle in the Black struggle for liberation. Charging that the agency was "a basically colonial administration designed to pacify neighborhoods," the group resolved to "tie up the UPO bureaucracy for as long as possible." Returning from lunch to an office suite jammed with protestors, Branton ordered the employees to disperse and resume their work. Instead, the group organized a series of impromptu workshops to discuss how their work should be overhauled. After four hours, the group ended their occupation with a collective statement. Echoing CURAC's demands, they called for UPO to be reorganized under the direction and control of the Black community.[22]

The next day, UPO leadership fired a further nine employees judged to be the action's organizers. Among those terminated were three additional staff members from NDC #1: Grover Dye, Judith Howell, and Herman Kitchens. Undeterred, the employees called a press conference

[21] Betty James, "UPO Staff Stages Work Stoppage to Protest Policies," *Evening Star*, April 19, 1968. "Dismissals Weighed at UPO," *Washington Daily News*, April 19, 1968; "Nine Fired by UPO After Protest," *Washington Daily News*, April 20, 1968.
[22] Bernadette Carey, "UPO Dissidents Stop Work, Denounce Ghetto Programs," *The Washington Post,* Apr 19, 1968; James, "UPO Staff Stages Work Stoppage."

three days later in front of UPO headquarters. By firing them, they contended, the agency was seeking to evade the real issue, which was that "the poverty program has the purpose of keeping oppressed people looking to their oppressors for the solution to their oppression." Compelled to speak out, the workers asserted that Black self-determination was a prerequisite to any lasting solutions for the problems that plagued the inner city. [23]

While several of the terminated UPO staff fought to retain their jobs, hoping to reform the agency from within, others knew their salaried War on Poverty days were over. Having witnessed an influx of OEO funding into Shaw through their work together at NDC #1, Howell and Street shared the conviction that federal anti-poverty efforts did little to address racial and urban inequality's root causes. Genuine attempts to do so, they felt, were regularly undercut by agency leadership. They were further united in their distrust of the urban renewal experiment taking place in Shaw, which they feared would produce the same results of mass displacement despite RLA and MICCO's claims of citizen participation. Unclear what came next, the one thing Howell and Street knew for certain is that they would no longer work within the power establishment's constraints.[24]

Initially continuing to organize with CURAC, Street left the group in August after its leadership pursued a more conciliatory posture towards MICCO and UPO. Discussions about developing a new grassroots organization began among a small core group that fall. Raised in Baltimore, the 25-year-old Street was highly analytical and headstrong. His time at Howard provided an immersion in emergent Black Power discourses alongside training in architecture and design. Howell first developed her organizing skills as a youth member of Bronx CORE. She

[23] Bernadette Carey, "7 Dismissed Workers Lash Back at UPO: Programs Attacked as 'Irrelevant'," *The Washington Post,* Apr 23, 1968; Barry Kalb, "7 Fired Workers Blast UPO Policy, Programs," *Evening Star*, April 23, 1968.
[24] Bernadette Carey, "Hearing Opens in UPO Firing Case," *The Washington Post,* May 8, 1968; Judith Howell in discussion with the author, June 2021.

then headed South to tutor students in Prince Edward County, Virginia that had been denied education following the county's decision to close the public schools rather than integrate them. After leaving UPO she contracted with the Black-owned advocacy planning firm 2MJQ. Fellow NDC #1 alumnus Diana King further shaped the group and its aspirations. The center's former education coordinator, she had organized parent patrols to investigate the conditions of Shaw schools. They were soon joined by Musa Foster, an American University student and cofounder of its Black Student Union OASATAU. Further radicalized by his experience distributing food and water during the April uprising, Foster was recruited to join the group by Howell. [25]

The cohort of young organizers joined a crowded field vying to mobilize DC residents. What set them apart from other community groups in Shaw and the broader matrix of Black Power organizing in Washington was their unwavering focus on shared land ownership and cooperative economic development as the keys to self-determination. Forming under the banner of the Black Land Movement (BLM), the group's Statement of Purpose is worth quoting in full:

> The Black Land Movement is a community organization which seeks to create a real alternative of self-reliance to the masses of community blacks who are being suffered by bureaucratic genocide. Our basic objective is the ownership of land for the black community. BLM's purpose is to inform and organize community blacks under this frame of mind, while at the same time assisting our people with the solutions to current problems, such as food, clothing, and shelter. We favor an economic development program based on cooperation (cooperativism) among blacks under an umbrella type of joint interest corporate structure, BLM, representing and coordinating the positive action image of black people locally and nationally.[26]

In essence, BLM's theory of change centered an alternative vision of urban renewal that relied on the self-development and collective action of Shaw residents rather than government agencies and their intermediaries such as MICCO. Contending that federal control of the redevelopment process further disempowered the Black urban poor and left them vulnerable to displacement,

[25] Howell, interview; Khalid Moussa Foster in discussion with the author, June 2021.
[26] "Statement of Purpose," *Black Land News*, December 1969.

BLM viewed the ownership of land as a critical prerequisite to exercising community power. In order to acquire land, the group called for the establishment of a buying corporation, with parcel purchases to be funded by the proceeds of cooperative enterprises.

BLM acknowledged from the outset that their agenda was ambitious and would face many obstacles to its realization. In addition to questions related to how its programs would function financially and logistically, it faced early skepticism from other Shaw-based organizers about its radical posture and ability to reach and speak to the concerns of its perceived base. Its commitment to political and financial independence, expressed through a refusal to apply for federal funding or foundation grants with excessive strings, also meant that it operated initially on a slower timetable. BLM's founders believed in the power of their expansive vision to draw together people who would sacrifice time and money in service to a shared cause. That several had left behind salaried agency jobs helped to bolster their collective credibility.[27]

Among the group's first public acts was its participation in a press conference in March 1969 alongside several other UPO-descended and now independent groups, including CHANGE from Upper Cardozo and Northeast Organizers from the H St. NE area. The meeting was called following the city's announcement that it would hire Fauntroy's new private firm Inner City Planning Associates to prepare post-riot rebuilding plans for the 14th St. and H St. corridors in addition to its role in Shaw. While the no-bid contract was offered in the interest of expediency, the coalition charged that the decision cut their neighborhood groups out of processes they were already deeply engaged in and extended Fauntroy's domain of influence undemocratically. BLM

[27] "Editorial," *Black Land News*, December 1969; Joseph D Whitaker, "Group Seeks Shaw Land Control," *The Washington Post,* Oct 29, 1969; "Why Black Land Movement?" *Black Land News*, May 1, 1971, Microfilm P00-22 DN99-1077, Wisconsin Historical Society Library.

members read a statement of opposition based on their attempts to organize alternative vehicles for renewal in Shaw and expressed solidarity with the 14th St and H St. groups' objections.[28]

Black Power radicals had other reasons for opposing Fauntroy and MICCO beyond their predominance in securing city and federal contracts. Over the past year MICCO had worked with Fairchild-Hiller, a defense contractor headquartered in nearby Hagerstown, Maryland, to establish a light industry plant in Shaw. The new company, FAIR-MICCO, provided jobs for local residents as well as management and ownership opportunities for African Americans. Officials and the press heralded the business, which they saw as a model for manufacturing's return to the inner city and new partnerships between Black and corporate America. Less discussed were the plant's primary outputs: ammunition cases, electronics assemblies, and wooden pallets destined for Vietnam. Bitterly opposed to the war, BLM members and other activists viewed the deal as evidence of the compromises made by many within the civil rights mainstream, remaining silent on Vietnam with the hopes of advancing domestic policy goals.[29]

For BLM, FAIR-MICCO offered a negative object lesson on how economic development might be put in service to the political project of self-determination. The viable alternatives to seeking inclusion in an expanding U.S. "warfare-welfare state," however, were far from self-evident. Discovering what, if any, they were required the group to move beyond mere critique of existing structures and engage in an on-the-ground process of construction and experimentation. Black autonomy, its founders held, had to be built from the ground up if it was to exist at all.[30]

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[28] Fauntroy's Urban Plans Denounced by Citizens." *The Washington Post,* Mar 03, 1969; Susan Jacoby and Phineas R. Fiske, "Groups Vie to Control Rebuilding of Riot Areas," *The Washington Post,* Mar 05, 1969.
[29] Robert G Kaiser, "Ghetto-Run Firm Set for Hard-Core Jobless," *The Washington Post,* Mar 01, 1968; Vincent Paka,"Fairmicco Turns a Hard Core Profit," *The Washington Post,* Sep 14, 1969; Foster, interview. On the efforts of the NAACP, National Urban League, and Bayard Rustin to silo off antiwar dissent in order to maintain close ties with the Johnson Administration, see Simon Hall, *Peace and Freedom: The Civil Rights and Antiwar Movements in the 1960s* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania, 2005), 80-104.
[30] On the warfare-welfare state, see Ruth Wilson Gilmore, "Globalisation and US prison growth: from military Keynesianism to post-Keynesian militarism," *Race & Class* 40, no. 2/3 (1999): 171-188.

"A Real Alternative of Self-Reliance": The Organizing Campaigns of BLM

Throughout the spring and summer of 1969 BLM began to develop its own program more concretely. It opened an office at 816 Rhode Island NW, near the geographic center of the Shaw Urban Renewal Area, to serve as its headquarters of operations. Soliciting donations from supporters and small businesses, Street and Howell were able to take on modestly paid positions while several others received stipends. A growing cadre of volunteers acted to further extend the group's reach. With this administrative architecture in place, BLM organized its work into four main components: community planning, cooperative enterprise, youth leadership, and political education and communication. Each of these spokes revolved around BLM's alternative vision for Shaw's redevelopment and required ongoing base-building efforts to sustain them.[31]

In May, the group went public with its seven-point "Comprehensive Plan for Shaw Urban Renewal." Building on work that BLM members had already begun at UPO, the plan addressed housing, education, transportation, economic development, public health, youth development, and early childhood services. In distinction to earlier iterations the schema called for most new neighborhood facilities to be cooperatively developed and operated. As part of these concept plans Street prepared architectural diagrams encompassing the entire urban renewal area. Among its most striking features was a proposal to close off most streets to automobile traffic except for key thoroughfares. Responding to persistent resident complaints that cars cut through residential streets en route to somewhere else—and reflective of the group's ecological consciousness—the plan advanced ample green and community space in their place. To serve the mobility needs of Shaw residents, it called for the creation of a rapid transit system serviced by minibuses.[32]

[31] Foster, interview; Whitaker, "Group Seeks Shaw Land Control".
[32] Foster, interview; Whitaker, "Group Seeks Shaw Land Control".

With this outline in place, BLM began holding charettes at its headquarters to gather feedback from residents and discuss revisions and refinements to the comprehensive plan. Aided by recent Howard architecture grad and regular volunteer Otis Daniels, they also conducted a series of planning workshops related to the development of specific blocks. Recognizing that their larger plan would take a decade or more to come to fruition, the group launched a housing campaign intend to show progress and serve as a bulwark against displacement. The campaign focused on educating Shaw residents about Section 235, a new program authorized by the HUD Act of 1968 with the goal of creating homeownership opportunities for low-income renters. With as little as $200 down, applicants could purchase a home with a heavily subsidized 1% interest rate and mortgage payments capped at 20% of household income. While highly critical of government programs, BLM organizers viewed Section 235 as a pragmatic route to grow Black control of the land and diminish the power of slumlords. They soon embarked on a door-to-door canvassing effort encouraging renters to buy and rehabilitate the homes they already lived in.[33]

BLM's cooperative enterprise component focused on practical ways to grow the collective economic power of Shaw residents with the hope that they would inspire larger undertakings in the future. Its first project was a cooperative food buying club, which it launched in July 1969 under the leadership of Chauncey Harris. A longtime Shaw resident and father of five, Harris brought a depth of connections to the program, which quickly grew to serve over 200 households. The program also drew on the experience of other consumer cooperatives across the city, including the Martin Luther King Food Coop in the Arthur Capper public housing project in SE D.C. Named the Cooperative Buying Association, the club operated out of BLM's offices

[33] Foster, interview; Howell, interview. On HUD Section 235 and how its manipulation by the mortgage lending and real estate industries left low-income Black households with unlivable homes and mounting debt, see Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, *Race for Profit: How Banks and the Real Estate Industry Undermined Black Home Ownership* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2019), 133-210.

and helped to bring residents into its orbit. In addition to purchasing canned goods and household items at a nearly 20% discount, members could become shareholders, which entitled them to vote on store policies, serve on the board of directors, and receive a rebate from annual profits. While meeting a very clear need, BLM members also saw the club as a way to nourish leaders.[34]

Growing the leadership capabilities of Shaw residents was a central objective of BLM's youth program, The Young Pioneers of New Africa (YPNA), which it developed over the course of 1969 and officially introduced at year's end. The youth organization took its name from Kwame Nkrumah's Young Pioneer Movement in Ghana while nodding to the Republic of New Afrika's efforts to create an independent nation in the Black Belt region of the US South. Initially led by Howell, YPNA was founded on the assumption that young people could play a key role in building a "self-reliant community" in Shaw, forming an energetic base for change and learning skills useful for neighborhood development. Beginning with participation in Thursday night "Soul Search Sessions" at BLM headquarters, YPNA grew to encompass a summer program the following year. Funded by a grant from a family foundation, YPNA's summer program provided growth opportunities unavailable in the traditional public school system. Youth learned African and African American history and culture with Foster in the mornings; they then transitioned to an afternoon design workshop led by Street. Workshop participants were taught basic woodcraft and carpentry skills and created furniture for personal use as well as resale. In this sense, YPNA members received an education at once deeply political and immensely practical.[35]

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[34] Foster, interview; Paul W. Valentine, "'Buying Club' Drops Shaw Food Prices," *The Washington Post,* Sep 22, 1969.

[35] Foster, interview; Judy Howell, "Discover," *Black Land News*, Dec 1969; Sylvester Green, "Soul Search," *Black Land News*, Dec 1969; "From the Top," *Black Land News*, May 1, 1971; "Black Land Design," *Black Land News*, May 1, 1971.

While BLM's work centered on the four components of community planning, economic cooperatives, youth development, and print communication, members also pursued elected roles on local commissions. These positions allowed BLM members to monitor government initiatives and provided them with a platform to broadcast their alternative agenda. In 1970 Street ran for a seat on the citizens advisory board of the Pilot District Project, a federally-funded community policing experiment. Running as a member of SNCC veteran and future D.C. mayor Marion Barry's People's Party ticket, Street narrowly lost to Kermit Miller, a former colleague from CURAC who was now affiliated with MICCO. The following year BLM mounted a wider campaign to elect its representatives to the Model Cities Commission. Street, fellow BLM staffer Jimmy Alvin Smith, and YPNA member Deborah Miller each won seats. The Commission's ability to exercise any real authority, however, quickly came under question due to both the multiple bodies of oversight active in Shaw and city efforts to reassert control over the renewal process. On the surface these electoral efforts appeared to conflict with BLM's strong assertion of Black political independence. Group members, however, saw campaigning and commission service as part of a spectrum of strategies intended to further Black community control. [36]

Through an array of initiatives, the members of the Black Land Movement developed a robust grassroots agenda for Shaw's renewal. Given the dedication of their core staff and a wide circle of cadre, they were able to realize glimpses of this project despite chronic budget shortfalls and the ups and downs of community organizing. Amplifying these neighborhood campaigns,

[36] Foster, interview; John Fialka, "Spectrum of Citizens in Precinct Race," *Evening Star*, Feb 4, 1970; "Barry's Slate Wins 14 Seats in Election," *Evening Star*, Feb 9, 1970; Marlowe Key, "Black Land Victory!! Model Cities Seats," *Black Land News*, May 1, 1971; Martin Well, "Model Cities Group Seeks to Learn what Power it has," *The Washington Post,* Jan 05, 1969. On the history of the Pilot District Project, see "Community Policing in the Nation's Capital," National Building Museum, 2018, https://www.nbm.org/community-policing-nations-capital-pilot-district-project-1968-1973/.

the group's work through *Black Land News* placed them in conversation with agitators across the city and Black Power activists nationwide.

"Bringing the Truth to Black Folks in the City": The Radical Views of Black Land News

First rolling off the presses in December 1969, *Black Land News* comprised an ambitious biweekly effort to reach "citizens of the Shaw Urban Renewal area and Black people in general" with messages neglected or suppressed by the white media. Edited initially by Jimmy Alvin Smith, the publication drew on the energies of the core staff and a wide cast of volunteers. Part of an underground newspaper upsurge in the period, *Black Land News* served simultaneously as an organizational newsletter for BLM, a community gazette that provided updates on local events and initiatives, and a national forum for Black political and cultural perspectives. As *the* publication evolved, so did the relative emphasis accorded to these different functions.[37]

With the tagline "Unity Through Truth!" on its masthead, *Black Land News* cast a critical eye on federally-directed urban renewal in Shaw and sought to rally residents around the politics of self-reliance. Of perennial concern was the question of who benefitted from the present process and who stood to lose. A feature article by Street described how property speculators bought up parcels within the urban renewal area boundaries only to resell them at a much higher price to the RLA several years later. These "land grabbers…are primarily white, have little concern about the future of the neighborhood, and are interested only in making a profit." This process—further encouraged by Congressional legislation preventing a freeze on title transfers—"depletes the government's acquisition money, making community development that much harder and less of a reality for poor black people." In addition to calling out white speculators, editorials inveighed against "'community leaders' and other assorted bandits [that] rake off good

[37] "Editor's Note," *Black Land News*, December 1969; Foster, interview.

sized salaries" coordinating citizen participation structures that rarely achieved their stated aims. A thinly veiled criticism of MICCO and UPO, the charge reflected BLM's concern that the chief beneficiaries of anti-poverty and urban renewal programs were Black middle-class brokers rather than the Black poor and working class.[38]

Other pieces in *Black Land News* detailed the stalled progress on redevelopment. The article "Is Shaw Go?" questioned the ceremonial fanfare surrounding the Lincoln-Westmoreland apartment complex's groundbreaking in December 1969, contending that it distracted from the city's failure to achieve forward movement in relocating Shaw Junior High School, a project it had embarked on three years earlier. Asserting that "the procedure for executing the Shaw Urban Renewal Area as proposed (and 'approved') is somehow going out of control," it cast this delay and misdirection "as an early warning signal of things to come." For further evidence, the editors cited the interim parks announced by Nixon in his early speech on the District. The pocket parks not only took a year and a half to complete, well past their declared summer deadline, they were also each located at the same intersection and across from a preexistent playground. On top of such absurdities, article authors narrated how agency promises to cut red tape and jumpstart rebuilding efforts in the wake of the riots seemed to yield little traction.[39]

While numerous *Black Land News* stories registered urban renewal's lack of tangible results, other pieces explored what could happen if the approved plans for Shaw were actually realized. In these assessments the experience of Southwest over the previous two decades loomed large. Noting the disparity between the low-income housing sketched out in MICCO plans and the need, an unsigned editorial concluded that "although part of the land will go for 'public housing,' there are enough people on NCHA's waiting lists now to fill those places. So,

[38] Bill Street, "The Land Grabbers," *Black Land News*, May 1, 1971; Why Black Land Movement?".
[39] "Is Shaw Go?" *Black Land News*, May 1, 1971.

those of us who cannot afford a new apartment or can't see going into debt for a rehabilitated house will just have to leave our community." Contributors concluded that the serial process of displacement would continue absent drastic intervention, only this time underwritten by claims of participation and consent. In the end, as YPNA member Sylvester Green put it, "Black people will still be living with rats that bite our babies [and] living in over-rented houses that need to be condemned." Illustrating the deep skepticism many held about both government initiatives and white motives, these commentaries simultaneously served as rallying cry, calling for residents to join the Black Land Movement and together construct an alternative.[40]

Stretching outside the Shaw neighborhood, other stories in *Black Land News* chronicled struggles across the city related to housing and development as well as education and policing. Many of these articles drew on the relationships BLM maintained with other organizations. The inaugural issue featured a cover story on a citywide public housing strike in response to proposed rent increases that involved over 3200 tenants at its peak. Others relayed the efforts of public housing tenants to exercise power on elected Neighborhood Planning Councils or play a lead role in post-riot rebuilding. Articles also examined the backlash tenants faced for organizing, such as the eviction of resident leaders at the privately managed Penn Southern apartments in SE D.C. Broader issues of development, including battles to permanently defeat the proposed inner loop freeway overwhelming rejected by voters in November 1969, were also featured in the paper. These articles were joined by others exposing the conditions of public schools or the actions of police, such as the killing of 16-year-old teenager Gregory Coleman for stealing a planted bike. Distributed at sites across the city, the paper extended BLM's reach and that of its partners.[41]

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[40] Why Black Land Movement?"; Sylvester Green, "Soul Search".
[41] Joe Kelly, "Public Housing Strike Rolls On!!" *Black Land News*, December 1969; Joe Webb, "Area 16's 3 Ring Circus," *Black Land News*, December 1969; Bill Street, "4 C's Fight Back…" *Black Land News*, May 1, 1971; "Penn Southern: Web of Woe," *Black Land News/ Magazine*, Sep 14-30, 1972, Microfilm P00-22 DN99-1077,

In addition to local coverage, *Black Land News* reported on developments nationwide. These articles demonstrated the rapid evolution of Black politics and cultural production in the early 1970s, attesting to the critical role of underground newspapers and independent journals within the circulation and refinement of Black radical thought and aesthetics in these years. They also displayed the experimental character of Black Power ideology. A May 1971 article saluted the Republic of New Afrika's securing of pastureland in Mississippi to serve "as the hub of a future Black nation." The same issue reported positively on the formation of the Congressional Black Caucus in March and its battles to wrest recognition and results from President Nixon. A Black-led coalition's ascendance to the Berkeley City Council amidst the People's Park confrontation also received praise. That these divergent approaches to exercising Black strength were each covered speaks to the searching nature of the editors and the period more broadly.[42]

Beyond covering national events, the paper also provided space for commentary from prominent movement leaders along with lesser-known activists. An issue from September 1972 featured excerpts from Amiri Baraka's speech at Howard reflecting on the recent National Black Political Convention in Gary; it also carried an opinion piece by V. Loretta Alston analyzing the rising incarceration of young Black men through an explicitly Marxist-Leninist lens of class oppression. Spreads adorned with Pan-African symbols carried segments on Black historical figures such as Marcus Garvey and spotlighted the work of contemporary poets such as Nikki Giovanni. They also reflected the growing emphasis on culture and consumption as terrains of

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Wisconsin Historical Society Library; Marcia Bowser, "Case of the U St. Speedway," *Black Land News*, December 1969; Rodney Gregg, "Shaw Jr. Hell," *Black Land News*, December 1969; "Black Justice: A People's Trial," *Black Land News/ Magazine*, Sep 14-30, 1972. On the police killing of Gregory Coleman and the curtailment of Black mobility in the District, see John Bloom, "'To Die for a Lousy Bike': Bicycles, Race, and the Regulation of Public Space on the Streets of Washington, DC, 1963–2009," *American Quarterly* 69, no. 1, (2017): 47-70.

[42] David Lambiss, "R.N.A. Nation in Bolton, Mississippi," *Black Land News*, May 1, 1971; Norma Threadgill, "Black Caucus," *Black Land News*, May 1, 1971; Musa Foster, "Radical Slate Wins in Berkeley," *Black Land News*, May 1, 1971. On the role of papers and journals within the evolution of Black radical politics and aesthetics, see Tinson, *Radical Intellect*; Fenderson, *Building the Black Arts Movement*; Smethurst, *The Black Arts Movement*.

struggle through discussions of organic foods and images of Black women adorned in natural hairstyles. In these ways and others, *Black Land News* displayed the immense outpouring of Black radical thought across the country in the early 1970s, including its ideological divergences and internal contradictions. [43]

Over the four years it was published the purview of *Black Land News* expanded from a primary focus on Shaw to encompass more national and international concerns. This editorial shift reflected the growing sophistication of Black Power politics and the diminishing prospects for BLM's initiatives by 1972-73. While the output of the paper extended significantly beyond what is known to have been preserved, the available record demonstrates that *Black Land News* offered a distinct contribution to both the underground newspaper landscape and the circulation and development of Black radical discourses within D.C. and beyond.

"The Black Struggle Has Come to Land": BLM's Vision of Self-Determination

BLM's cry for land formed part of a larger chorus calling for Black self-determination in the late 1960s and early 1970s. What this popular demand fully entailed was the subject of frequent and often fierce debate, demonstrating both the expansive range of Black Power aligned strategies and the ideological fissures that would spread further in the years to come. Central to these debates were the questions of 1) how to conceptualize and pursue Black political autonomy in relation to the U.S. state and other mediating institutions and 2) how to secure the conditions for Black economic development amidst profound and sustained urban disinvestment. Not unlike the coverage of its newspaper, BLM's exploratory approach to these questions brought together a

[43] "Imamu at Howard," *Black Land News/ Magazine*, Sep 14-30, 1972; "Community Forum," *Black Land News/ Magazine*, Sep 14-30, 1972; "Black Culture," *Black Land News/ Magazine*, Sep 14-30, 1972; Preston Gale, "Natural Food," *Black Land News/ Magazine*, Sep 14-30, 1972.

diverse set of tendencies and tactics that confounded the sharp distinctions of intellectual polemics and evolved over time in response to shifting local and global conditions. [44]

In many ways, BLM's political development mirrored that of the Black Power movement more broadly. Similar to the prescriptions offered in Stokely Carmichael and Charles Hamilton's 1966 *Black Power*, early statements from Street at a public forum reflected a strategy premised on the militant assertion of ethnic group interest: "Black people can no longer aim at integration. I mean I'm convinced it's a pluralistic society. Each one's seeking something for their own. The Jews, the Irish, the Italians…Their supporting their own interests." As the applicability of white ethnic advancement models to the specificities of the African American experience came under question from activists—and as revolutionary winds began to blow globally—the envisioned ends of Black independence became increasingly identified with those of anticolonial liberation movements. For Street and BLM, the creation of a self-reliant Shaw came to prefigure a larger process of nation-building, one that would transform colonized Black communities in the United States into liberated zones knit closely to each other and ultimately the African diaspora.[45]

The colonial analogy offered a powerful conception of the structural elements and spatial organization of anti-Black racism in the United States. It also generated conundrums for BLM's everyday political strategy. Would aiming to take over the existing state apparatuses through the electoral process facilitate a pernicious form of neo-colonialism, leaving oppressive economic structures firmly intact while elevating a small class of Black elites, a mirror to the African

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[44] For examples of these debates see the exchange "Black Cities: Colonies or City-States?" and the presentations preserved from the 1969 National Black Economic Development Conference. "Black Cities: Colonies or City-States?" *The Black Scholar* 1, no. 6 (1970); *The Review of Black Political Economy* 1, no. 1 (1970). On the strategic ambiguities that traversed Black Power struggles, see Manning Marable, *Race, Reform, and Rebellion: The Second Reconstruction in America, Revised Second Edition* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1991), 96-99.
[45] Mary Wiegers, "Dialogue Between Black and White," *The Washington Post,* Feb 11, 1969. On the relative moderation of *Black Power*, see Peniel E. Joseph, *Waiting 'Til the Midnight Hour: A Narrative History of Black Power in America* (New York: Holt, 2006), 198-202. On Carmichael's revolutionary Pan-African shift several years later, see Stokely Carmichael, "Pan-Africanism: Land and Power," *The Black Scholar* 1, no. 1 (1969) 36-43.

continental future foretold by Fanon and Nkrumah? Would the creation of parallel forms of governance and provision internal to the Black community constitute an American Bantustan, an ironic and under resourced embrace of racial segregation, as Black Marxist critics of political and economic separatism predicted? Unable to resolve these tensions in advance, BLM's campaigns resided within them. While stressing the potential dangers of state cooptation, they also ran candidates for local advisory commissions, one of the few opportunities for formal political participation afforded to District residents. While acutely aware of the cost of going it alone, they primarily focused on the elaboration of Black-run community alternatives.[46]

In calling for Black control of the land BLM proposed a system of cooperative ownership through which Shaw would be developed environmentally, economically, and socially. This schema drew on decades of Black cooperative economic enterprise during the Jim Crow era, collective efforts that managed to produce a measure of security despite sustained and often violent white opposition. It was particularly reminiscent of W.E.B. Du Bois' plan for large-scale economic cooperation among African Americans during the Great Depression, which sought to turn the pre-existing reality of a partially segregated economy into an asset for racial uplift. Beyond providing for group advancement, Du Bois asserted that African American consumer and manufacturing cooperatives could provide a paradigm for broader economic transformations amidst the failures of capitalism to meet basic human needs. While rejected by the NAACP as an accommodation to segregation, helping to precipitate his 1934 resignation from the organization

[46] Robert L. Allen, *Back Awakening in Capitalist America* (Trenton: Africa Word Press, 1991), 13-20; Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove, 2004), 97-144; Kwame Nkrumah, *Neo-Colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism* (New York: International Publishers, 1965); Henry Winston, *A Marxist-Leninist Critique of Roy Innis on Self-Determination and Martin Kilson on Education* (New York: New Outlook Publishers, 1973), 19-22; Thomas Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty: The Forgotten Struggle for Civil Rights in the North* (New York: Random House, 2008), 425-430; Nikhil Pal Singh, *Black is a Country: Race and the Unfinished Struggle for Democracy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 193-211.

he had co-founded, Du Bois' plan for Black "self-dependence" received renewed attention as Black Power activists sought to circumvent the second ghetto's deprivations in the 1960s.[47]

Distinguishing the philosophy underlying BLM's cooperative agenda from socialism, Street submitted that "if we gotta call it something, call it collectivism." This hesitance spoke to the complex negotiation of socialist ideas and identification within Black Power circles, best exemplified by Carmichael's own vacillating declarations on the relation of the Black liberation struggle to the global socialist project in 1968. Even as many left-leaning nationalists admired elements of socialist developmental models, most refused to be subsumed under Communist influence abroad or multi-racial coalitions closer to home, postures which would negate their independence. The circulation in the United States of a distinctly African socialist ideology of Ujamaa, centered in Nyerere's Tanzania, would help facilitate a renewed interest in socialist ideas more broadly several years later, a turn reflected in later issues of *Black Land News*.[48]

BLM's emphasis on land ownership and encouragement of Shaw residents to herald the "power in property" by becoming their own "private developers" seemed to point in the opposite direction, bearing a resemblance to the Black capitalist agenda espoused by the now-nationalist Congress on Racial Equality (CORE). Drafted by national director Roy Innis, CORE's 1968 "Economic Theory of Nationhood" called for the takeover of all institutions operating within the Black community and their reorganization under parallel political structures defined by "natural sociological units." Differentiating chosen separation from forced segregation, Innis asserted that the former could create the conditions for economic self-sufficiency while facilitating the growth

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[47] On the history of African American cooperatives see Jessica Gordon Nembhard, *Collective Courage: A History of African American Cooperative Economic Thought and Practice*. (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2014). Du Bois outlines the cooperative plan he advocated during the Depression era in W. E. B. Du Bois, *Dusk of Dawn: Toward an Autobiography of the Race Concept* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 83-110. See also Joseph P. DeMarco, "The Rationale and Foundation of DuBois' Theory of Economic Cooperation," Phylon 35, no. 1 (1974) 5-15.

[48] Wiegers, "Dialogue Between Black and White," Joseph, *Waiting 'Til the Midnight Hour*, 224-25, 289.

of Black-owned "capital instruments: land and other property." Shorn of its sharper edges, Innis' ideology of economic separatism proved compatible with Republicans' criticism of anti-poverty programs, celebration of free enterprise, and tolerance for segregation. Following a confidential meeting, then-candidate Nixon agreed to adopt elements of the plan as his own Black capitalism initiative while CORE militants agreed to direct their rhetorical fire elsewhere.[49]

Despite the broad stroke similarities between CORE's agenda and their own, BLM was harshly critical of Black capitalism and its advocates. The particularities of their vision for Shaw were more aligned with the plan for fostering Black autonomy articulated by leftist radicals such as Detroit's James Boggs. In his presentation to the National Black Economic Development Conference—entitled "The Myth and Irrationality of Black Capitalism"—Boggs proposed social ownership of key institutions, arguing that individual enterprise would chiefly benefit the small Black middle class, in effect "replacing white exploiters with black ones." Any development efforts, he argued, should elicit the leadership and initiative of the lowest rungs of Black society, providing youth in particular "real and not just rhetorical opportunities to participate in the actual planning and development of the black community." From his vantage point as a former Dodge autoworker, Boggs cautioned against training programs that would prepare people for jobs that were "already or will soon become obsolete." Finally, he called for the repurposing of eminent domain, "previously exercised only in the interests of white developers and residents" as a tool for challenging extractive economic forces and furthering Black community control over cities.[50]

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[49] Allen, *Back Awakening in Capitalist America*, 185, 186; Robert E. Weems, Jr, *Business in Black and White: American Presidents and Black Entrepreneurs in the Twentieth Century* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 110-126. On the role of federal policy in the racialization of the residential property market, see David Freund, *Colored Property: State Policy and White Racial Politics in Suburban America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

[50] James Boggs, "The Myth and Irrationality of Black Capitalism," in Stephen M. Ward, ed. *Pages from a Black Radical's Notebook: A James Boggs Reader* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2011), 189-194.

Even as BLM demurred from Boggs' explicit socialist commitments, their cooperative project resonated with the activist's class-conscious interpretation of Black Power and farsighted perception of postindustrial urbanization. Their campaigns sought to activate "the masses of community blacks" whose interests were regularly subsumed beneath those of the business and ministerial class that claimed to represent them. In so doing they paid particular attention to the development of youth and the significance of their ideas to the neighborhood's reconstruction. Convinced that automation was swiftly eliminating the industrial sector jobs proposed as the solution to urban unemployment, BLM's vision of cooperative development centered chiefly on social reproduction, with renewal plans that highlighted health, education, and childcare facilities as critical economic enterprises in addition to key human services. Perhaps most of all, BLM organizers shared with Boggs the conviction that transformative change would emerge primarily from the self-activity of the Black working class rather than trickling down from above. [51]

BLM's nation-building rhetoric at times conflicted with the class stratification assumed in their analyses and prescriptions. Like many Black Power groups, BLM frequently appealed to "the Black community" as a quasi-sovereign political body to which it answered. While critically contesting the ideological predominance of the U.S. state imaginary, such authorizing gestures also obscured the profound internal diversity of Black urban populations through their projection of national integrity. The deployment of Black identity as itself an imprimatur also hindered BLM's ability to articulate the distinction between the forms of representation they championed and those they viewed as inauthentic and performative (such as MICCO). Absent an acknowledgment of the fractures that render unitary notions of community impossible, BLM often relied on polemics, accusing rival groups of selling out or serving their own interests. [52]

[51] "Statement of Purpose"; Whitaker, "Group Seeks Shaw Land Control"; Webb, "Go to the Land".
[52] Why Black Land Movement?"; "Statement of Purpose."

Dynamics within the organization also limited their ability to engage Shaw's deeply heterogenous population. Like many Black Power groups, BLM's internal culture revolved around its charismatic male leadership. Women such as Howell held significant positions in the group yet seldom defined its public presence. While women reported and provided commentary for *Black Land News*, the politics of gender did not receive prominent attention in its pages, an absence further conspicuous given the centrality of social reproduction and Black women's labor within BLM's vision for Shaw's cooperative development. Further, an article on J. Edgar Hoover featuring the use of "faggot" as an epithet suggests a tolerance for anti-gay sentiment. Adherence to these patriarchal patterns and heterosexist attitudes constrained the group's reach and hampered the growth of a committed cadre.[53]

BLM's equation of power with territorial control exhibited a masculinist tendency; it also risked a repetition of settler-colonial postures. At the core of its vision of self-determination laid a troubling question: whose land is being claimed as Black land? While articles in *Black Land News* lamented how "white Americans slaughtered Indians to obtain the land," its pages tended to cast Indigenous presence and land stewardship as primarily elements of the past. This temporal distancing elided both the persistent land claims of the Piscataway Nation and its political resurgence across the Washington region during the same years that BLM was active.[54]

The ideological occlusions of BLM's nation-building vision were compounded by a strategic orientation that was at times idealistic and ill-defined. Even those deeply sympathetic to

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[53] Lena Williams, "J. Edgar Hoover," *Black Land News*, May 1, 1971. On the complex and often vexed relationship between Black Power and women's liberation movements in the city, see Valk, *Radical Sisters*, 110-34. On the divergence of 'Black' and "Gay' as anchors of collective identification in Washington, D.C. more broadly, see Holmes, "From Rainbow to Chocolate City."

[54] Isaiah Webb, "Go to the Land," *Black Land News*, May 1, 1971. On the history of the Piscataway Nation see Gabrielle Tayac, "Collective Identity Incorporation: The Piscataway as American Indians, 1608-1996," PhD diss., (Harvard University, 1999). On the disjunctures between Black and Indigenous epistemologies, see Tiffany Lethabo King, *The Black Shoals: Offshore Formations of Black and Native Studies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019).

projects aimed at securing Black economic independence and political sovereignty raised critical questions about their viability. Robert Allen, whose 1969 *Black Awakening in Capitalist America* strengthened and further spread the domestic colonial thesis, noted how cooperative enterprises could not escape the fundamental realities of capitalist competition, including the ability of giant corporations to operate efficiently through scale. The small surpluses that cooperatives might accrue would primarily go towards sustaining operations, leaving little for wider community benefits—such as BLM's scheme to use cooperative profits for land purchases. In "Toward an Overall Assessment of our Alternatives," economist Robert S. Browne laid out the profound resistance efforts to achieve formal sovereignty would face and how geographically disconnected and economically dependent cities offered a vulnerable basis from which to pursue autonomy. Collective advancement, he contended, required the clear acknowledgement that Black people in the U.S. did not express national sovereignty "in the customary sense of the word" nor would "the currently popular 'parallel economy' concept" provide for its achievement. Seeking to call into being its vision of an independent people rhetorically, BLM's projections of incipient Black nationhood tended to skirt these structural realities and the political and economic prerequisites to their surmounting.[55]

While BLM's constructive agenda was limited in its ability to transcend these broader historical conditions, its critical appraisals proved prescient. The group's unrelenting analyses of federal anti-poverty and urban renewal initiatives revealed how they ultimately preserved the asymmetrical power arrangements that had produced the ghetto in the first place. Despite forums for citizen participation, final authority over the urban redevelopment process rested with white government administrators and stood to benefit many of the private interests that had exploited

[55] Allen, *Back Awakening in Capitalist America*, 52-54; Robert S. Browne, "Toward an Overall Assessment of our Alternatives," *The Review of Black Political Economy* 1, no. 1 (1970), 19, 22.

Shaw residents for decades. BLM's formulation "bureaucratic genocide" rendered legible how the dizzying proliferation of policy experiments during the Johnson era—whatever the intentions of their architects—often obstructed tangible progress and fomented division in the communities they targeted. Contained in this sharp juxtaposition is the contention that federal programs exist on a continuum with the multiple death-dealing forces impinging on cities through their refusal to redress structural conditions. Such language further spoke to the reality that Black reformers, once drafted into state positions, effectively became co-managers of racialized urban inequality that went largely unabated. These concerns would be vindicated over the following decade as a wave of Black elected officials struggled to overcome austerity yet often became its enactors. [56]

The contradictions of federal initiatives, the fires of 1968, and the rising radicalism of the Black freedom movement spurred BLM's robust commitment to self-determination. In bringing together land-as-freedom discourses and the technical skills of community planning, BLM began to envision what a built environment of Black liberation might look like. Rather than being simply opposed to urban renewal, BLM insisted that its tools could be taken up directly by communities, who would not only provide input to the process but collectively determine and carry out the work of neighborhood regeneration. Its organizing campaigns, popular education programs, and community design charettes laid the groundwork for achieving these aspirations while its cooperative economic and youth development initiatives offered a glimpse of their realization. BLM's desire to "to shape not only our immediate environment, but also the very destiny of our people", extended to the work of *Black Land News*, which connected struggles in Shaw and DC to those taking place across the nation and throughout the diaspora. In each of these ways, BLM was able to forge an intervention far in excess of its small numbers.

[56] "Statement of Purpose." On the rise of Black elected officials and their role in implementing austerity regimes, see Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, *From #Blacklivesmatter to Black Liberation* (Chicago: Haymarket, 2016), 75-106.

Stalled Plans: The End of BLM and Shaw's Great Society Experiments

BLM's ability to enact its ambitious agenda decreased as grants and donations waned. Staff members initially took on outside jobs that allowed them to continue their political work in the evenings and on weekends, but the lack of consistent support took its toll. While continuing to carry out multiple campaigns through 1971, the group's core leadership eventually dispersed in pursuit of steady employment. Street soldiered on, continuing to publish *Black Land News* through 1973 while shifting the publication to a biweekly magazine format. An issue from this period carried a back cover urging subscriptions that opened with the declaration "This is not the End!" It was, however, in sight. The organizational life of the Black Land Movement lasted essentially five years, a considerable achievement given its political leanings and commitment to financial independence.[57]

The positions that former organizers took up after departing BLM revealed not only the concessions they made to insurmountable financial realities but also their evolving perspectives on how state power could be put to productive use. Howell took a position with Youth Pride Inc., a youth employment program based in Shaw and Columbia Heights led by Marion Barry and Mary Treadwell and underwritten by the Department of Labor. Foster became a popular educator with the National Welfare Rights Organization, joining Black women in the fight to establish a guaranteed adequate income at the federal level. In 1974, Street became the executive director of the Shaw Project Area Committee—a newly-established urban renewal advisory council funded by RLA. An ironic turn, the role enabled Street to continue his work as an advocacy planner yet also confirmed the demise of BLM's greater hopes for Shaw and beyond.[58]

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[57] Howell, interview; Foster, interview; "Subscribe Now!" *Black Land News/ Magazine*, Sep 14-30, 1972.
[58] Howell, interview; Foster, interview; Jane Rippeteau, "O Street Market: Saved by City, But Shaw Groups Call it Nonsense," *The Washington Post*, September 8, 1974.

By this time the federally-funded initiatives that BLM had earlier targeted for critique were facing their own profound setbacks. The Nixon Administration's efforts to unwind the War on Poverty targeted UPO for small cuts initially in 1969; when it moved to disband the Office of Economic Opportunity in 1973 it effectively eliminated a third of the community action agency's budget. MICCO, initially championed by Nixon's team, was the target of RLA ire by 1971. Moving to reassert authority over the redevelopment process, the agency shifted from negotiated contracts to competitive bidding and overruled MICCO's proposals for two different sites. After releasing a report citing citizen participation as a key contributor to the slow pace of rebuilding, the agency officially terminated MICCO's contract in 1973. [59]

BLM's dreams of a community-controlled and cooperatively-owned Shaw were confined largely to the drafting board, a fate it shared with similar efforts to requisition urban renewal as an instrument of Black nation-building. Like Amiri Baraka and the Congress of African People's vision of the New Ark or the Harlem Committee for Self Defense's hopes for Reclamation Site No. 1, BLM's plan to imprint Black independence in the built urban environment ran aground against the realities of institutional politics and inadequate resources. In attending to the Black Land Movement and its uncompromising vision of grounded self-determination, though, both the promise Black Power posed for cities and the price of its nonfulfillment are illuminated.[60]

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[59] Joanne Omang, "D.C. Altering its Poverty Programs," *The Washington Post,* Feb 08, 1973; Eugene L Meyer, "MICCO Cutoff Ends Citizen Control of Urban Renewal," *The Washington Post,* Jan 22, 1973; Gillette, *Between Justice & Beauty*, 183-89.

[60] Komozi Woodard, *A Nation within a Nation: Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones) and Black Power Politics* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 219-254; Brian D. Goldstein, *The Roots of Urban Renaissance: Gentrification and the Struggle over Harlem* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2017), 58-106; Brian D. Goldstein, "'The Search for New Forms': Black Power and the Making of the Postmodern City," *The Journal of American History* 103, no. 2 (2016), 375-399.

Chapter 2

"The Power to Control Our Lives and Our City": The D.C. Statehood Party and the Quest for Social Democratic Self-Government in 'The Last Colony'

> Residents of the last colony within this country's continental borders, we of the Statehood Party have come together to seek an end to seventeen decades' denial of rights that were set out for us in the Declaration of Independence and assured us by the Constitution. We seek nothing less than that granted 200 million of our countrymen: full participation in one of the states of the Union. We realize that to be half-free is to be half-slave. We realize that changes in our local government that do not result in statehood are only colonial reform. We realize that to be granted representation in Congress but not allowed to elect a local government with full and unencumbered powers is to leave us in frustrated limbo….
>
> The drive for statehood for D.C. stems from the bitter experience of colonies everywhere, even those under the most beneficent administration: neglect, misrule, and arbitrary, capricious government. Gaining statehood and thus full citizenship should not be viewed as a panacea, just simple decency. Statehood is not a utopia, it would merely lift us to the status of the rest of our countrymen. Statehood would not guarantee a successful future, but only make it possible. [1]

Addressing the ninety attendees of the D.C. Statehood Party's (DCSP) 1972 convention, Julius Hobson encouraged them to plan for the long run. The goal, the veteran civil rights agitator contended, was to build "a majority party in the District for the dispossessed"—a Black-led, grassroots left formation that could pursue change within the halls of power while working with those protesting outside them. By focusing on the tangible issues that affect people's lives, he asserted, the DCSP could mount a challenge to the Democratic Party monopoly in the city and create more space for radical demands within mainstream political discourse. Emblematic of this dual strategy, updates from the Children's March for Survival, fight for transparency at Federal City College, and ongoing campaign against D.C. Transit bus fare hikes were interspersed with the traditional convention activities of selecting a candidate and debating the party platform.[2]

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[1] Julius Hobson, "Testimony of the D. C. Statehood Party Before Subcommittee Number 1 of the House Judiciary Committee," July 22, 1971, Box 33, Julius Hobson Papers, The People's Archive, DC Public Library.
[2] "Statehood…An Open Convention," *Statehood Call*, March 1972, Box 1, D.C. Statehood Party Records, Kiplinger Research Library, DC History Center.

Founded in late 1970, the DCSP grew out of the D.C. Statehood Committee, an attempt by Hobson, freeway opponent Sammie Abbott, and anti-poverty minister Joe Gipson to add a referendum on statehood to the 1971 special election for D.C. non-voting delegate to Congress. Legally blocked from adding additional items to the ballot, Hobson instead joined the delegate race, with the aim of using the office to champion D.C. statehood. Despite his name recognition, Hobson's late entry into the election and lack of Democratic Party affiliation led to a lopsided defeat by Rev. Walter Fauntroy. The 15,000 votes for Hobson (13% of the total) did, however, help to establish the DCSP as the leading third party in Washington.[3]

Throughout 1971 the party provided a scaffolding for efforts to shepherd a statehood bill through Congress with the backing of California representative Ron Dellums. The DCSP also quickly expanded its focus, drawing on its network to assist the thousands of May Day antiwar protesters facing indefinite detention and thwart the draconian youth curfew proposed by the D.C. Council. At issue in the inaugural convention was whether the DCSP could evolve into something more: the permanent home of a new political coalition. Was it possible to unite the disparate elements of the grassroots left across race, class, gender, and sexual orientation while fielding candidates that could speak both to its concerns and those of a wider voting public? The platform that party members debated and adopted conveyed such a hope, with sprawling planks that included not only D.C. statehood and the decentralization of schools but also basic income, universal healthcare, gay and lesbian rights, access to abortion, and an end to the Vietnam War and American imperialism more broadly.[4]

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[3] Eugene L. Meyer, "Group Opens Drive for D.C Statehood," *The Washington Post*, November 26, 1970; Richard E. Prince, "Hobson Jumps into Delegate Contest," *The Washington Post*, January 15, 1971; Harvey Kabaker, "Hobson's Party has Strong Base in Racially Mixed Areas," *Evening Star*, April 11, 1971.

[4] George Derek Musgrove, "Statehood is Far More Difficult: The Struggle for D.C. Self-Determination, 1980-2017," *Washington History* 29, no. 2 (2017), 6; "Statement by Julius W. Hobson," May 6, 1971, Box 33, Hobson Papers; Mattie G. Taylor, "Letter to D.C. Council RE: Youth Curfew," November 12, 1971, Hobson Papers; "1972 DC Statehood Party Platform," 1974, Box 20, Josephine Butler Papers, The People's Archive, DC Public Library.

The DCSP formed part of a renewed national trend towards third parties, one that sought to recast the dissatisfaction of the Black liberation and antiwar movements with the Democratic Party into a durable political force. Beginning with the emergence of the Peace and Freedom Party in 1967, the phenomenon signaled both the possibilities of alliance and the persistent ways in which the left was riven by race, gender, and generation. Hobson would move to the center of this history in 1972, when he accepted the nomination of the People's Party to serve as a vice presidential candidate alongside famed pediatrician and antiwar activist Dr. Benjamin Spock.

At the same time, the DCSP reflected the particularities of political life within what party members described as "the last colony within this country's continental borders." Washington lacked the franchise entirely for ninety years following the defeat of Reconstruction; it would not be able to vote for president until 1964 or elect a local school board until 1968. Founded amidst the shift towards limited home rule—under which D.C. residents could elect a mayor and city council but Congress retained authority over the city's budget and veto power over local law—the DCSP fervently opposed this half-measure as yet another "colonial reform." The continued denial of full citizenship rights to a now majority-Black city, Hobson and others asserted, was intimately connected with race and perceptions of who is eligible to exercise self-governance. These withering criticisms of home rule notwithstanding, the DCSP also sought to capitalize on the new political openings that its implementation afforded, running candidates for city council.[5]

This chapter examines the rise of the D.C. Statehood Party and its bid to link local self-determination to broader societal transformation in the 1970-80s. Emerging at the intersection of Black Power battles and the anti-Vietnam upsurge, the party was shaped initially by Hobson's outsized persona and singular political vision. Its attempts to pursue radical change through the

[5] Hobson, "Testimony of the D. C. Statehood Party Before Subcommittee Number 1".

electoral arena indexed the challenges of creating a workable coalition across issue and identity and of translating street protest into state policy. The implementation of home rule in 1974 led to several party advances even as it further spurred the group's fierce advocacy of statehood. The distinct nature of organizing in the nation's capital affected the DCSP in other ways as well, as party members found themselves at the center of efforts to mobilize the federal workforce, suture divisions between national movements and local residents, and contest state surveillance and infiltration. Hobson's extended illness and early death in 1977 prompted new leaders to emerge; at the same time the party was beset by conflict and struggled to maintain its dynamism. Facing the multiple barriers that attended third party attempts to build power, the DCSP also grappled with the boundaries imposed by dominant political institutions and patriotic discourse. Carrying the party forward, Josephine Butler and Hilda Mason preserved a small foothold for it within local electoral politics while sustaining its social movement roots. The groundwork laid by the DCSP ultimately led to the passage of a city referendum on statehood in 1980 and constitutional convention two years later. Forwarding a deeply progressive vision for the city's self-governance rooted in the aspirations of its working-class Black majority, the constitution for the state of New Columbia approved by District voters in 1982 also formed a testament to the party and its refusal to divorce the quest for statehood from the broader struggle for social justice.

"To Be Half-Free Is to Be Half-Slave": Julius Hobson and the Halting Road to Home Rule

The crusade for voting rights in the South rendered their continued denial in the nation's capital glaring by the late 1950s. With the federal government increasingly (if very reluctantly) intervening to ensure access to the ballot elsewhere, how could it deny the same it home? The 23rd Amendment, ratified in 1961, extended the right to participate in presidential elections to D.C. citizens. It did not, however, provide for local elections or Congressional representation.

Stymied by segregationists in the House, the struggle for self-government in D.C. joined the broader fight for civil rights among the city's Black majority. As such, it was only a matter of time before its banner was taken up by Julius Hobson.

Characterized by opponents and allies alike as irascible, Julius Hobson was fond of saying "I sleep mad." Hobson would put this anger to good use, leading countless campaigns to end discrimination in employment and track-based segregation in schools. Born in Birmingham, Alabama, Hobson served in World War II in the European theatre and graduated from Tuskegee Institute before moving to Washington in 1946. Enrolled in the Economics program at Howard University, he would leave following a dispute with his PhD advisor to conduct research for the Library of Congress' legislative reference service and later the Social Security Administration.[6]

With a son entering school the same year as the *Brown* decision, Hobson got involved in efforts to desegregate the schools, joining the PTA and then the D.C. branch of the NAACP. It is in these groups that Hobson developed what Lauren Pearlman describes as his "trademark blend of research and confrontation politics," publicly challenging both school administrators and the Metropolitan Police Department while backing up his claims with binders of statistics. This work brought Hobson into the orbit of CORE, which recruited him to head the local chapter in 1961. Alongside an interracial army of picketers, Hobson broke down barriers to Black employment in retail and transit and ended segregation in apartment complexes. Stunts such as the Rat Wagon, a car affixed with a wire cage and a loudspeaker threatening to release trapped rats in Georgetown, drew the attention of the press and action from the local government. He would also befriend and

[6] "Julius Hobson: A Goad for Change," *The Washington Post*, July 2, 1972; Cynthia Gorney, "Julius Hobson Sr. Dies," *The Washington Post*, March 24, 1977.

mentor a younger generation of organizers, including Howard students Stokely Carmichael and Courtland Cox, members of the Nonviolent Action Group who would go on to lead SNCC.[7]

Despite these successes, Hobson was on a collision course with CORE leadership. His domineering style in running the chapter clashed with CORE's democratic and consensus-based approach, and his commitment to nonviolence was more a matter of pragmatic strategy than philosophical conviction. On top of this, his tough tactics targeting the retailers had earned the ire of CORE's labor union backers. A boycott of the schools unilaterally called by Hobson led to a split in the chapter; the national leadership sided with the anti-Hobson faction and expelled him from the organization in 1964. Hobson quickly regrouped by forming a chapter of Associated Community Teams (ACT), a network of radical civil rights protest organizations founded by Gloria Richardson of Cambridge, Maryland, and which Malcolm X was exploring membership in following his much-publicized departure from the Nation of Islam. A small but active contingent of former CORE members joined Hobson.[8]

During his time heading ACT Hobson leaned into his growing reputation as a militant. He frequently castigated mainstream civil rights leaders, whom he dismissed as "pasteurized, nearly white negros." He considered forming a partnership with the armed Deacons for Defense and Justice, rattling the local authorities. He deployed the language of Black Power, extorted its adherents to "internationalize the struggle," and discussed the need for revolution. He coauthored a young adult book on the history of Black nationalism entitled *Black Pride*. Yet in other ways Hobson was out of step with the growing race radicalism of the later 1960s. He retained his crisp

[7] Pearlman, *Democracy's Capital*, 22; Burt Solomon, *The Washington Century: Three Families and the Shaping of the Nation's Capital* (New York: Harper, 2004), 135.
[8] Asch and Musgrove, *Chocolate City*, 334-339; Ben A. Franklin, "Militant Negroes Form New Group," *The New York Times*, April 19, 1964. On Hobson's hierarchical style and how it diminished women's leadership in CORE, see Anne M. Valk, *Radical Sisters: Second-Wave Feminism and Black Liberation in Washington, D.C.* (Urbana-Champaign: Illinois, 2008), 22-23.

white collared shirt and black fedora in the era of the dashiki; he defended traditional education and technical expertise. Following his divorce in 1966, he met and later married a white woman (Tina Lower). When Carmichael returned to Washington to form the Black United Front, his former mentor served briefly on the steering committee before choosing to withdraw, dissenting from its exclusion along racial lines and its inclusion of a broad ideological spectrum.[9]

Hobson's aversion to unquestioned racial solidarity stemmed from several sources. His period studying economics at Howard University left him a socialist. Otto Nathan, a Marxist economist and émigré from Nazi Germany, shaped his conviction that systems rather than individuals were the locus of responsibility and source of change. Courses with Eric Williams imparted on him the material roots of racism in the colonial thirst for land and labor; lectures from Paul Sweezy persuaded him that a democratically planned economy was necessarily part of the solution to ongoing racist exclusion. Hobson's reflections on the Black Power Conference in Newark displayed these commitments, in which he counseled attendees not to repeat "the white man's mistakes by attempting to build an equally exploitative and racist black capitalism" and instead "move to the left towards socialism." While he remained independent from any partisan tendency, Hobson would claim the socialist label throughout the rest of his life.[10]

Hobson's experience of white radicals who regularly formed part of the picket line also led him to challenge racialist impulses. In the same 1967 set of reflections on Black Power, he reminded readers that "the struggle is multi-racial and worldwide. There are resources outside of

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[9] Jim Hoagland, "500 Attend Quiet Anti-War Rally," *The Washington Post,* November 6, 1966; William Raspberry, "Bogalusa Unit Plans Move to D.C.," March 30, 1966; Julius Hobson, "Black Power: Right or Left?" in Floyd B. Barbour, ed. *The Black Power Revolt* (Boston: Extending Horizons, 1968), 199-203; Janey Harris and Julius Hobson, *Black Pride: A Peoples Struggle* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1969); Julius Hobson, "NIPA Conversational Paper Draft," October 07, 1967, Box 33, Hobson Papers; Martin Weil, "Don't Burn Cities Yet, Hobson Warns," *The Washington Post,* March 4, 1968; Solomon, *Washington Century*, 180-182.

[10] "Hobson: A Goad for Change"; Hobson, "Black Power: Right or Left?", 202, 203; Julius Hobson, "Black Power and Capitalism," in Stanley L. Wormley and Lewis H. Fenderson, eds. *Many Shades of Black* (New York: Morrow, 1969).

our color-camp which we need and should utilize." Further, Hobson warned "there is a thin line between the concept of virtuous blackness and the concept of racism—the rightist doctrine for which we have justifiably condemned the white man." Beyond this nominalism stood his special scorn for the Black leadership class and especially preachers, who he thought took advantage of their parishioners to gain material advantages. Hobson's avowed and at times combative atheism distanced him from much of the Black community and ensured that any respect he expressed—or for that matter received—was decidedly earned.[11]

While Hobson's obstinate personality and unpopular ideological positions kept him on the margins in some ways, they freed him to move in others. With no one above him to answer to, Hobson launched a sprawling lawsuit against the school system in 1965. The suit alleged that de facto segregation persisted in D.C. schools despite a decade of decreed desegregation. Armed with chart after chart, Hobson demonstrated that most schools remained racially imbalanced and that predominantly white schools spent over a third more per pupil. He also attacked the tracking system through which schools were segregated internally essentially by race and income. Federal judge Skelley Wright concurred with this assessment, handing down a far-reaching decision that dismantled the existing method of tracking, evenly distributed resources across the system, and opened up opportunities previously unavailable to Black and poor students.[12]

The *Hobson v. Hansen* decision in June 1967 sent shockwaves throughout the city, it also grew Hobson's stature as someone who could near single-handedly force change. That summer the Johnson Administration submitted Reorganization Plan No. 3 to Congress, which proposed to replace the District's three commissioner system with a presidentially appointed mayor and nine-

[11] Hobson, "Black Power: Right or Left?", 203; "1 Man's View of D.C.'s Ills," *The Washington Post*, July 3, 1972.
[12] Asch and Musgrove, *Chocolate City*, 339-341; Martina Pinkney Matthews, "The Politics of Julius W. Hobson, Sr. and the District of Columbia Public School System," diss., (Ohio State University, 1981).

member city council. When it passed in August, the ad hoc Washington Committee on Black Power quickly mobilized a mock council election—one that Hobson won handily. While the White House did not respond to the committee's straw poll, the drive towards some form of political representation was becoming unstoppable. A bill allowing for an eleven-member elected school board passed later that year, with elections scheduled for November 1968. Of the 64 candidates, Hobson was the only candidate elected without having to enter a runoff, making him the first elected official in the District of Columbia since the 1870s.[13]

As the only elected citywide body, the school board bore a political weight outsized to its actual purview. When a conservative bloc united to defeat Hobson's presidency he quickly resumed the role of agitator, cheering on students as they took over the board meeting to demand Black studies and sex education and giving speeches encouraging youth to occupy their schools, riffing that "they had nothing to lose but their ignorance." Alongside these headline-grabbing antics Hobson pursued the more sober work of monitoring post-*Hansen* policies through the newly established Washington Institute for Quality Education. He also drafted *The Damned Children: A Layman's Guide to Forcing Change in Public Education* in order to instruct others in his unique method of educational reform.[14]

The school board was not the only forum rocked by takeovers in 1969. The city council became the site of a contentious fight when 200 members of the Emergency Committee on the Transportation Crisis (ECTC) packed into its chambers to demand a no vote on the North Central Freeway and Three Sisters Bridge. Formed four years prior, the ECTC comprised a multi-racial, cross-class coalition committed to defeating a planned system of freeways that would carve up

[13] "Hobson Wins Straw Vote," *The Washington Post*, August 22, 1967; Editorial Board, "Back to School," *The Washington Post*, November 7, 1968; Pearlman, *Democracy's Capital*, 47-49.
[14] Solomon, *Washington Century*, 180-182.; Julius W. Hobson, *The Damned Children: A Layman's Guide to Forcing Change in Public Education* (Washington: Washington Institute for Quality Education, 1970).

the city while largely serving the needs of suburban commuters. With cries of "No White Man's Road thru Black Man's Home!" the older and onetime Communist Sammie Abbott and young Black Power activist Reggie Booker built a formidable opposition to freeway expansion, holding up construction through both litigation and direct action. Segregationist Kentucky representative William Natcher, however, tied subway construction funding to the completion of the freeway system in a show of congressional power over local citizens. Backed into a corner politically and physically, the council ordered police to clear the room, leading to the arrest of Abbott, Booker, Hobson, and eleven others. The unelected body then voted 6-2 to approve the freeway plan.[15]

While protests continued against the construction of the Three Sisters Bridge, growing more militant by the month, others began to consider ways to fundamentally alter the city's captive status. In March of 1969 Rev. Doug Moore of the Black United Front and journalist Chuck Stone of the *Afro-American* announced the formation of the D.C. Statehood Committee, vowing to achieve self-determination for the District "by any means necessary." Little followed from their press conference, but it sparked the imagination of *D.C. Gazette* editor Sam Smith, who published "The Case for Statehood" the following year. Responding to common objections against D.C. statehood and outlining a process by which it could be achieved, the white journalist reiterated a demand for "equal footing, not some more benevolent form of colonialism." The bill passed in September granting the District a non-voting delegate in the House of Representatives seemed to Smith and many others only to reinforce its constitutional subordination.[16]

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[15] Asch and Musgrove, *Chocolate City*, 360-366; Bob Levey and Jane Freundel Levey, "End of the Roads," The Washington Post, November 26, 2000; Craig G. Simpson, "The D.C. black liberation movement seen through the life of Reginald H. Booker," *Washington Area Spark*, January 28, 2020, https://washingtonareaspark.com/2020/01/28/the-d-c-black-liberation-movement-seen-through-the-life-of-reginald-h-booker/.

[16] Paul W. Valentine, "Police, Militants Skirmish," *The Washington Post*, November 17, 1969; Sam Smith, *Captive Capital: Colonial Life in Modern Washington* (Bloomington: Indiana, 1974), 271; Sam Smith, "The Case for Statehood," *D.C. Gazette*, June 15, 1970; Musgrove, "Statehood is Far More Difficult," 5.

They also sensed in the delegate contest an opportunity to challenge Congress and its capricious rule. In November, Abbott, Hobson, and community organizer Rev. Joe Gipson formed a new D.C. Statehood Committee with the goal of repurposing the special election as a referendum on statehood. Concurrently, Smith and a small group of Hobson allies who sought to draft him as a candidate registered the D.C. Statehood Party with the Board of Elections. The Committee's effort to place the referendum on the ballot was rejected, as was its suit to block the delegate election entirely as unconstitutional. With all other paths foreclosed, Hobson chose to enter the race and announced his candidacy in January, two months before the election.[17]

Hobson's chief opponent in the race was Rev. Walter Fauntroy of SCLC and MICCO, the winner of the Democratic primary. While Hobson promised at his campaign launch to focus on the issues, he also lobbed invectives at Fauntroy, dismissing him as "little lord Fauntroy" and a candidate "running in the shadow of a dead man." Brochures cast Hobson as a man of action, touting his work securing jobs for Black residents and reforming the school system, portraying Fauntroy in contrast as a mere "Mr. words." Yet neither Hobson's extensive record as a change agent or highly charged insults could overcome Fauntroy's ground game, which was backed by both local Black ministers and national Democratic operatives. Fauntroy sprinted across the finish line with nearly 60% of the tally; Hobson finished third behind Republican John Nevius.[18]

Undeterred, Hobson met with a hundred campaign supporters the following week, urging them to join him in building the new DCSP at the ward level. Assuring those gathered that "I've got a number of axes to grind," he named a number of fights that the party would join, including

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[17] Meyer, "Group Opens Drive for D.C Statehood"; David R. Boldt, "Advocate of Home Rule Back Phillips in Race," *The Washington Post*, December 31, 1970; "Hobson Election Suit Rejected," *The Washington Post*, January 6, 1971; Prince, "Hobson Jumps into Delegate Contest."

[18] David R. Boldt, "Delegate Candidate Hobson Vows at Kickoff to Campaign on Issues," *The Washington Post*, February 18, 1971; Phil Hilts, "Julius Hobson: 'I'm Damn Angry on Issues'," *Washington Daily News*, March 15, 1971; "Campaign Brochure," 1971, Box 33, Hobson Papers; "Fauntroy Election Certified," *The Washington Post*, April 6, 1971.

those against freeways and for decent housing. The party would also push forward the drive for statehood, blowing past any signs that the election results may have also been a repudiation of immediately pursuing it. Seeking support for a statehood bill in Congress, the DCSP found their champion in Ron Dellums, a first-term representative from Oakland. An antiwar candidate and Democratic socialist from a family of prominent Black labor activists, Dellums was appalled by how segregationist congressmen continued to domineer the mostly Black city and became the bill's prime mover. Fred Schwengel, a moderate Republican from Iowa and supporter of civil rights, co-sponsored the legislation.[19]

Testifying before a House subcommittee hearing in July on behalf of the DCSP, Hobson inveighed against "seventeen decades of the denial of rights" that leave D.C. as "the last colony within this country's continental borders." Redefining the federal district and admitting the rest of the city as a new state, he argued, offered a simpler route to securing these rights than either a constitutional amendment to allow for congressional representation or legislation to provide for local elected government. Further, each of these alternative proposals retains the city's unequal status, with the latter preserving Congress' legislative authority and in effect nullifying the local government's ability to enact widely supported measures such as "instituting a commuter tax, repealing some of the repressive aspects of the D.C. Crime Bill or ending freeway construction." Resistance to statehood for Washington, Hobson asserted, stemmed ultimately not from rational argument but from the unspoken factor of race: "few people in the District doubt that the racial composition of the city has been the major obstacle to the granting of full self-government."

[19] C. Brandon, "Hobson and Supporters May Third Party Plans," *The Washington Post*, March 29, 1971; "Washington, D. C. Statehood Called For By Dellums," *Sun Reporter*, July 17, 1971.

Dismissing the "step-at-a-time approach" as akin to "special hurdles for Blacks to leap through," Hobson forcefully pressed for an immediate path towards statehood.[20]

While elegant in its simplicity, Hobson's case for creating the 51st state received little backing beyond its initial sponsors. Expressing concern that statehood would lead to an end to the federal payment to the city, Fauntroy moved quickly to quash the bill. Instead, the delegate pursued the more pragmatic strategy of securing limited home rule, beginning with a plan to unseat John McMillan, the segregationist head of the House District Committee who opposed any advances in self-government. With its signature objective stalled in Congress, the DCSP would need to expand its scope of action if it was to establish itself as a viable political alternative. It would also need to evolve beyond an ad hoc electoral vehicle for a charismatic figure—a task that became more urgent when Hobson announced in October that he had contracted multiple myeloma, a rare and fatal bone cancer.[21]

"Many Common Demands": Coalition Building and the Vexed Politics of Peace and Freedom

Throughout 1971 the DCSP sought to establish itself internally, with the goal of moving "from a basic group to a real party." Volunteer committees were formed to register voters and run the office as well as draft the party's proposed platform and prepare for its first convention. Drawing on the diffuse energies of its founding members, the DCSP became a regular presence at demonstrations in the city, both those related to local issues and national mobilizations. With a foot in the struggle for Black liberation and the fight to end the war in Vietnam, party leadership would seek to mediate conflict between these two movements, often unsuccessfully. Its attempts

[20] Hobson, "Testimony of the D. C. Statehood Party Before Subcommittee Number 1."
[21] "Fauntroy Attacks Plan on Statehood," *The Washington Post*, July 15, 1971; Asch and Musgrove, *Chocolate City*, 379; William Raspberry, "Hobson Foe Unbeatable," *The Washington Post*, October 25, 1971.

to fashion a New Left electoral bloc, both locally and nationally through its role in the People's Party, evinced the challenge of sustaining coalition across embodied and ideological difference.[22]

In seeking to expand its base, the party drew on not only Hobson's popularity but also the credibility of its founding circle, many of whom were well known activists in the city. Bettie Randall, head of the local chapter of the Medical Committee for Human Rights, served initially as the party's chair. Radical priest Bill Wendt from St. Stephen and the Incarnation Church acted as treasurer. Joining Gibson to complete the remainder of the executive committee were Charles Cassell, a school board member and former Black United Front chairman, Warren Morse, labor organizer and Hobson's longtime partner on the picket line, and Chauncey Thomas, active with the anti-poverty group CHANGE. Beyond these officers and the aforementioned Abbott and Smith, the following individuals played key roles in the party's formation: Josephine Butler, a public health worker and tireless multi-issue activist whose socialist commitments traced back to the Popular Front era; Hilda Mason, a school board member and assistant principal of Adams Community School who was at the forefront of local civil rights struggles alongside her husband Charlie; Tina Hobson, Julius' spouse and front runner in efforts to mobilize women in the federal workforce; Lou Aronica, *de facto* head of the party's office; Mike Lewis, director of Hobson's campaign; Bruce Waxman, Vietnam veteran active against the war; Laurie Wright, welfare rights organizer; and Loren Weinberg, member of the SDS-descended New American Movement.[23]

Meeting in April after Hobson's defeat in the delegate race, the DCSP steering committee outlined the essential, if mundane, tasks it would need to undertake in order to establish the party

[22] "Minutes of the D.C. Statehood Party," April 7, 1971, Box 33, Hobson Papers.
[23] "Application for the Approval of the Name of a Political Party," December 31, 1970, Box 33, Hobson Papers; "How Does the D.C. Statehood Party Affect You?" 1971, Box 3, Sam Smith Papers, The People's Archive, DC Public Library; Chauncey and Sondra Thomas, interview, January 6, 1999, Box 1, D.C. Statehood Movement Leaders Oral History Project, The People's Archive, DC Public Library.

locally. Members debated what to prioritize, including voter outreach, fundraising, education on statehood and its alternatives, and candidate recruitment. Urgent mobilizations, however, swiftly overtook the sober work of party-building. On May 3rd, the Nixon Administration deployed an unprecedented force of 10,000 federal troops and uniformed officers to quell May Day, a mass direct action aimed at ending the Vietnam War. Contending "if the government won't stop the war, we'll stop the government," an estimated 25,000 protesters had gathered in the city with plans to block traffic and prevent federal employees from reaching their offices. They were met with tanks, teargas, and sweeping arrests; 7,000 were detained on the 3rd and an additional 6,000 over the following three days. Conditions in the make-shift prisons, which included an outdoor practice field next to RFK stadium, were squalid; the preventive detention of thousands was also blatantly unconstitutional. Hobson, who had spoken repeatedly at antiwar rallies in Washington since 1966, drew on the DCSP network to provide meals and legal support for the demonstrators. As detainees continued to wind through the courts in the weeks that followed, DCSP members interviewed a number of them with plans to publish a book on the protests and their aftermath.[24]

The party also sprang to action that fall in protest of a curfew bill targeting local youth. Put forward by the city council first in August, the bill would have barred youth ages 8-16 from being outside or in public between the hours of 11pm-5am or during school periods. DCSP flyers cast the measure as "a new link in the D.C. slave chain" – one that extended the unfreedom of the recently passed D.C. Crime Bill, legislation promoted by Nixon that authorized preventive detention and 'no knock' police raids. Local residents, the party asserted, were once again

[24] "Minutes of the D.C. Statehood Party," April 7, 1971; Ivan C. Brandon, "Blacks Gave Protesters Food," *The Washington Post*, May 6, 1971; Mariette, "here we are we've been detained not a one of us has been arraigned," *Off Our Backs*, May 27, 1971, Independent Voices, Reveal Digital, JSTOR; "Julius Hobson, "Proposed manuscript for book examining various aspects of the 1971 May Day demonstrations in Washington, D.C.," May 29, 1971, Box 33, Hobson Papers. On May Day 1971 see also L.A. Kauffman, *Direct Action: Protest and the Reinvention of American Radicalism* (London: Verso, 2017), 1-34.

serving as "national guinea pigs for a Constitutionally questionable ordinance," with the city a "helpless testing ground" for "new police power," an experiment made possible through its lack of democratic representation. Led by Cassell, current members and candidates for the school board wrote letters to the council expressing their dissent from the proposed curfew and its wide reach. The bill was ultimately tabled after Cassell, mothers from a local welfare rights group, and affected youth angrily confronted councilmembers during a November hearing on the measure.[25]

The DCSP's actions supporting May Day protesters and preventing the punitive curfew proposal gained the party some new attention; they also drew the group's energy away from the quotidian chores that may have grown its membership. While voter registration and fundraising lagged, planning efforts proceeded afoot in two areas: drafting a party platform for adoption and preparation for the party's inaugural convention early the following year. Calling a convention served several purposes at once. First, as a registered major party with the D.C. Board of Elections, the DCSP needed a formal process for nominating candidates. Holding a convention and taking nominations from the floor offered a less labor-intensive route than a primary for placing candidates on the ballot. Second, the convention furnished an opportunity to bring together activists typically dispersed in their own pursuits, an assembly that would hopefully generate excitement for the party in the process. Finally, Hobson hoped the occasion would showcase the new leadership emergent within the party, a critical need if the DCSP was to persist, particularly given his growing illness and uncertain future.[26]

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[25] "Curfew: New Link in D.C Slave Chain?!?," November 1971, Box 1, D.C. Statehood Party Records; "Letter to Councilmembers from Schoolboard Candidates," November 10, 1971, Box 33, Hobson Papers; "9 Candidates Oppose Curfew," *The Washington Post*, November 16, 1971; Eugene L. Meyer, "Furor Attends Hearings by D.C. Council," *The Washington Post*, November 17, 1971.

[26] "Minutes of the D.C. Statehood Party," April 7, 1971; "Hobson Resigns as Party Chief," The Evening Star, July 07, 1971.

Held in February 1972, the DCSP's inaugural convention also sought to convey in real-time the new kind of political coalition it envisioned. The schedule called for presentations from organizers immersed in local fights such as those to democratize Federal City College and shift bus service to community ownership as well as activists working on a national front to prevent cuts to the social safety net and protect war dissenters. A discussion of related platform planks—such as Schools and Colleges, Transportation, or National Policy—was paired with each of these updates. Carefully constructed, the agenda signaled both the DCSP's determination to root its policy prescriptions within the demands emanating from protest movements and its contention that addressing "the real issues that affect people of the District" was the best path to power. It was further indicative of how New Left activists were increasingly bringing their movement ideals to the municipal level, seeking to pilot alternatives in the absence of federal reforms.[27]

Debated first at the convention and adopted soon after, the party's sprawling platform displayed its far-reaching vision for the city and society as whole. In addition to statehood, the document prescribed the creation of elected neighborhood councils with veto and spending powers, an equitable distribution of resources across wards, and the decentralization of schools and curricula. It proposed free public transit as an alternative to highway expansion, public ownership of central city land and key commercial strips, and the conversion of rental housing to cooperatives. Police were to be disarmed and largely replaced with neighborhood constables trained in conflict resolution; educational and rehabilitative programs would supplant jails and prisons. Free healthcare and developmental childcare would be supported through progressive taxation, as would a guaranteed income. Laws that regulated the sexual activity of consenting adults or interfered with women's rights to control their own bodies would be abolished, and the

[27] "Convention Agenda," February 26, 1972, Box 1, D.C. Statehood Party Records; "Statehood…An Open Convention."

rights of children would be recognized. Acknowledging that achieving these objectives would require transformation far beyond the borders of the District, the platform concluded by calling for "an end to American imperialism at home and abroad" and expressing solidarity with the self-determination struggles of others.[28]

At once radically ahead of its time and representative of a particular political and cultural moment, the platform revolved chiefly around the party's long-range goals. More immediate at the convention was the selection of a candidate to face Fauntroy in the November election. Three African American candidates were nominated from the floor, after which each nominee made brief remarks. Josephine Butler touted her experience leading the Morgan Community School board and work on an array of campaigns, from forming the first union at an American Lung Association chapter to mobilizing the local community in defense of Angela Davis. Charles Cassell, an elected member of the Board of Education and regular presence at city council hearings, focused his pitch on Fauntroy's failure to fight for statehood and how he would challenge this throughout the campaign. Mike Lewis, a co-chairman of the party, described how he would draw on his experience running Hobson's campaign the year before. Ultimately, members selected Cassell for the delegate race by majority vote. An eloquent speaker with a deep, booming voice, Cassell promised to follow in the footsteps of his mentor and hold Fauntroy's feet to the fire. Subtly—or not so subtly—hinting at his successorship of Hobson, Cassell dressed sharply and could rarely be seen without his smoking pipe.[29]

[28] "1972 DC Statehood Party Platform."
[29] "Convention Chooses Cassell," *Statehood Call*, March 1972; David R. Boldt, "Statehood Party Chooses Candidate," *The Washington Post*, February 27, 1972; John Hanrahan, "A Tribute to Josephine Butler, Activist," *Rock Creek Monitor*, May 17, 1979, Washingtoniana Periodicals Collection, The People's Archive, DC Public Library.

The selection of Cassell over Butler to serve as the party's primary face pointed to tensions within the DCSP, ones that threatened its coalitional aspirations. While Cassell was a known entity through his seat on the school board, Butler had contributed much of the behind-the-scenes work that enabled the party to get off the ground. Beyond the choice of candidate, men chaired nearly all the sessions at the convention. The perception that women's leadership had been slighted was further compounded when poor time management led to the bumping of a presentation on sexism and women's rights by the *Off Our Backs* collective. Writing in the DCSP newsletter *Statehood Call*, Laurie Wright decried the sexism that was "so pervasive at the convention" and the ways it manifested through the party's internal culture and public stands. Encouraging women to "break out of our roles" and men to "become conscious of their sexism," Wright charged the party to integrate women's liberation into its vision of self-determination—a demand that led to an expanded platform and eventually organizational shifts.[30]

Strategic differences surfaced at the convention as well, particularly over the DCSP's relationship to the national political scene. Shortly after receiving his cancer diagnosis in the fall of 1971, Hobson received an invitation from Dr. Benjamin Spock to join him in a new venture. A best-selling author on parenting and prominent voice denouncing the Vietnam War, Spock was running for president as a representative of the People's Party, a recently-formed alliance of left-wing third parties—and he wanted Hobson to join the ticket as his vice president. Desperate to keep moving, Hobson agreed to join the protest campaign, soon embarking on cross-country trips despite the debilitating pain he experienced. Up for debate at the February convention was whether the DCSP would formally affiliate with the People's Party and work to secure its place on the upcoming ballot. While Hobson was on the ticket and party administrator Lou Aronica

[30] "Sexism in DCSTP," *Statehood Call*, March 1972, Box 1, D.C. Statehood Party Records.

had already plunged into the effort, others weren't so sure. Sam Smith contended that doing so would diminish the DCSP's standing locally and dilute its energy; while Hobson drew 13% in the delegate race, third party candidates typically draw only 1-2% in national contests. Others countered that affiliating with a national party could raise the visibility of statehood and cited the significant overlap between the two parties' platforms. The latter group won, and the DCSP voted to formally join The People' Party alliance along with 45 other local parties.[31]

The People's Party represented the latest attempt to forge a national electoral coalition encompassing antiwar, Black liberation, and New Left forces. Beginning with the 1967 National Conference for New Politics, activists sought to create the conditions for a viable alternative to the mainstream of the Democratic Party, which under Johnson both expanded the disastrous war in Vietnam and had begun its rapid retreat from an assault on poverty at home. As Simon Hall has demonstrated, this search for a 'new politics' that could unite radicals and disaffected liberals towards a reconstruction of U.S. society and its global orientation more frequently revealed the sharp cleavages between different sectors of 'the movement.' Black Power advocates at the 1967 gathering were themselves split over whether or not to work with white activists and the terms through which an alliance might be forged; white paternalism and its obverse expression through pandering guilt only further eroded the prospects for building trust. Conference attendees further disagreed over questions of strategy and whether the focus of their efforts should be electoral campaigning or community organizing, a divide that proceeded largely along generational lines while pointing towards growing ideological divergences.[32]

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[31] Benjamin Spock to Julius Hobson, October 21, 1971, Box 37, Hobson Papers; "Statehood…An Open Convention".

[32] "NCNP News," May 7, 1967, Radical Ephemera and Underground Publications, San Diego State University Library; Simon Hall, "On the Trail of the Panther: Black Power and the 1967 Convention of the National Conference on New Politics," *Journal of American Studies* 37, no. 1 (2003), 59-78

While the 1967 conference was ill-fated, the impulses behind it drove the growth of The Peace and Freedom Party later that fall. An electoral coalition between white radicals and the Black Panther Party's Oakland chapter, the Peace and Freedom Party registered enough voters to achieve ballot status in fourteen states, starting with California. The party endorsed the Black Panthers' Minister of Information Eldridge Cleaver for president at its founding convention in March 1968, selecting him over activist comedian Dick Gregory along with Spock, who had just been indicted alongside other members of the "Boston Five" for advocating draft evasion. Too young to serve as president were he to be elected, Cleaver was disqualified from appearing on the ballot line in multiple states, leading party affiliates to substitute Gregory or leave the top of the ticket blank. Nevertheless, the two Peace and Freedom candidates combined finished fourth in the popular vote that November—enough to prolong the dream of a third party presidential run from the left for another four years.[33]

Over the next few years New Left third parties cropped up across the country, each seeking to offer an alternative to Democratic capitulation and the politics of "lesser evilism." These groups, including the Peace and Freedom Party, Arizona's New Party, Michigan's Human Rights Party, and Vermont's Liberty Union Party, would then join forces to form the People's Party in 1971. Positioning itself as "more committed to the next generation than the next election," the party predicted little success in the short run yet hoped to prepare the ground for an eventual political realignment. In translating its socialist ideals into a familiar American idiom, the party drew frequently on the symbolism of the 19th century populist movement—an act of recovery that likely reinforced perceptions that the party was white dominated. While Black and

[33] Simon Hall, *Peace and Freedom: The Civil Rights and Antiwar Movements in the 1960s* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania, 2005), 154-156; James M. Elden and David R. Schweitzer, "New Third Party Radicalism: The Case of the California Peace and Freedom Party," *The Western Political Quarterly* 24, no. 4 (1971), 761-774.

Chicano activists held key roles within the party and its platform endorsed self-determination for communities of color, its rank and file were largely white and local affiliates disagreed over the degree to which race should be discussed. The party's nomination of Spock for president, which many viewed as critical to attracting media attention, was greeted with a yawn by others who saw the doctor as old and uninspiring. With his extensive civil rights record Hobson's decision to join the ticket helped to boost the People's Party credibility. At the same time, his relationship with the ragtag group served to reaffirm his estrangement from the Black political mainstream, which increasingly sought to exert its influence through the apparatus of the Democratic Party.[34]

Hobson's distance from the pack was further exposed that summer as long-simmering tensions between Washington's Black activists and the largely white leadership of the antiwar movement reached a head. In June, a group of sixty led by DC school board president Marion Barry released a statement denouncing the antiwar movement, charging that it tokenized Black voices and failed to stress the racist nature of the war and its connection to oppression at home. The "myopic attitudes and actions of racism within the so-called peace movement" also actively hurt the local community, the collective statement asserted, by wasting its tax dollars on unruly demonstrations and encouraging enlarged police budgets. Signers demanded the cancellation of the next week's "Ring Around the Capitol" demonstration, an event focused on women and children that was organized without the local Black community's consent. In its stead, the group called for a closed summit between themselves and antiwar movement leaders.[35]

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[34] "Total Voters Guide," *Los Angeles Free Press*, November 3, 1972; Clint Pyne, "The Populist Revolt in North Carolina," May 1972, *Grass Roots*, Box 87, Hobson Papers; Findlay Campbell, "African Liberation Day," May 1972, *Grass Roots*; "Spock, Again," *Off Our Backs*, January 1972; Johnson, *Revolutionaries to Race Leaders*, 119-130.

[35] Paul W. Valentine, "Peace Movement Held Racist," *The Washington Post*, June 17, 1972.

Members of the DCSP responded forcefully to the allegations, which they argued were politically motivated and set a dangerous precedent. Hobson, a frequent speaker at anti-Vietnam War marches and likely target of the token Black leader comment, cast the statement as "idiotic" and contended that representatives of the movement "shouldn't give the attack credibility" by attending the summit. Perhaps, he mused, local leaders were urging quiescence in exchange for votes on home rule. Cassell acknowledged the statement as "a valid indictment of the racism that pervades all of American society" but argued "it is ludicrous to turn that indictment away from the Nixon administration and towards any group that is fighting Nixon's policies." The solution to forcing "the colonial serfs in Washington…to pay out of our local taxes for the policing and cleanup connected with demonstrations against the national government" is not to limit freedom of speech or assembly, but to support full self-determination for the city. To assert otherwise, Cassell argued, not only confuses the issue at hand but risks aiding US aggression abroad.[36]

As others who objected to the statement pointed out, the claim that antiwar activists downplayed the racism driving the war or its adverse effects on efforts to end domestic poverty was somewhat off the mark—such rhetorical connections were routine, particularly among the People's Coalition for Peace and Justice. The statement did, however, corroborate the breach between rhetoric and reality when it came to concrete support for Black struggles on the part of many war dissenters. That several of the signers had shuttled food to May Day detainees only a year before shows they felt such acts of solidarity were not often reciprocated. Further, residents had long complained about the local fallout from national protests, including the exploiting of unrest on the National Mall to expand criminalization throughout the city. Concerns that the

[36] Bart Barnes, "Antiwar 'Racism' is Denied," *The Washington Post*, June 18, 1972; Betty Medsger, "Protest Set, Peace Group Tells Blacks," *The Washington Post*, June 21, 1972; Charles Cassell, letter to the editor, *The Washington Post*, June 21, 1972; Fred Halstead, *Out Now!: A Participant's Account of the Movement in the United States Against the Vietnam War* (New York: Pathfinder, 1991), 681-683.

careless actions of middle-class white youth might boomerang on the poor Black city were widespread. [37]

The federal government was all too happy to exploit these tensions between the antiwar and Black liberation movements in Washington—and frequently did. In March 1971, eight peace activists broke into an FBI office in Media, PA and stole over a thousand classified documents, revealing for the first time the existence of COINTELPRO: the Bureau's program for surveilling, infiltrating, and disrupting domestic political organizations, particularly those on the left. The following January, former Washington field agent Robert Wall published an account detailing his office's efforts to track and harass Black radicals, antiwar organizers, and college students in the capital. Included in the admission was how the FBI had successfully sewn division between the New Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam (New Mobe) and the local Black United Front in 1969. Forging a letter claiming to be from the Front, agents demanded a $1 per head tax for every demonstrator the New Mobe planned to bring to the city that October and further stipulated an initial payment of $25,000 for the Front's support of the march. Spurred on by an informant, angry negotiations continued between the two organizations for several months, ending only after Hobson intervened. While the demands were eventually withdrawn, the Bureau had accomplished its task of spreading distrust between prospective partners and drawing energy away from preparation for the march. The Black United Front – New Mobe incident comprised just one example of the ways that counterintelligence agencies disrupted local activists, national groups active in Washington, and the relationships between them. The extent of government surveillance and harassment in the city—which was conducted not only by the FBI but also the

[37] Charles Cassell, letter to the editor, *The Washington Post*, June 21, 1972; Hall, *Peace and Freedom*, 178-179; Pearlman, *Democracy's Capital*, 116-137.

CIA, US Army, and metropolitan police department—would become further evident over the following decade due in large part to a lawsuit initiated by Julius and Tina Hobson.[38]

One motivating factor in the government's regular surveillance of the Hobsons was their efforts to mobilize the federal workforce on behalf of racial justice, women's rights, and peace. As federal employees themselves—Julius with the Social Security Administration and Tina with the Civil Service Commission—each had been subjected to discrimination while attempting to advance their careers. Drawing on these experiences, each led campaigns challenging the raced and gendered barriers that persisted despite agency claims of equal opportunity. While with ACT Hobson worked alongside individual Black federal workers to address their grievances, arming them with talking points for their hearings while he plead their case outside with a bullhorn. His 1968 *Saturday Evening Post* opinion piece "Uncle Sam is A Bigot" laid out in devastating detail how Black workers were concentrated and kept within the lowest-paying government jobs. Tina, a founding member of Federally Employed Women (FEW), authored reports pressuring federal agencies to tackle the gender imbalance in their staff and spoke frequently on the need to elevate women from the secretarial pool to the policy level.[39]

Beyond lobbying for change in the internal practices of federal agencies, the Hobsons joined others seeking to politically activate the several hundred thousand federal employees who worked in the city. Overcoming fears of reprisal and an official culture of silence, organizations such as Federal Employees for Peace and the Committee on the Rights and Responsibilities of

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[38] Robert Wall, "Special Agent for the FBI," *New York Review of Books*, January 27, 1972; Abe Bloom to Julius Hobson, September 25, 1969, Box 37, Hobson Papers; Karl E. Meyer and Carl Bernstein, "Army 'Radical' Desk: Domestic Spying," *The Washington Post*, December 24, 1970; Jared Stout and Toni House, "Informers Spied on D.C. Activists," *The Evening Star*, October 7, 1973; Ronald Kessler and Alfred E. Lewis, "Activists Watched By Police," *The Washington Post*, February 12, 1975; Halstead, *Out Now!*, 484-486.

[39] Julius Hobson, "Uncle Sam is a Bigot," *Saturday Evening Post*, April 20, 1968; Claudia Levy, "Women Rap U.S. on Jobs," *The Washington Post*, June 25, 1972; Frederick W. Gooding Jr., *American Dream Deferred: Black Federal Workers in Washington, DC, 1941-1981* (Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh, 2018), 120-123.

Federal Employees held vigils on the steps of the Capitol, picketed the sale of war bonds by the Treasury, and conducted referenda to show government workers' support for a full withdrawal. A forerunner among bureaucrats who refused to be bowed, Julius Hobson featured regularly at their conferences and rallies. Representing FEW, Tina Hobson condemned forced sterilization and criminal prosecution for abortion and galvanized government employees behind the Equal Rights Amendment. Forming an internal opposition to the Nixon administration, left-leaning government workers comprised part of the distinct organizing landscape in the capital, one that was uniquely positioned and closely tracked.[40]

Civil rights vets battling to improve schools and defeat freeways, young radicals working to end the war or topple traditional gender roles, members of the federal workforce urging a shift in national priorities—each formed a building block of the DCSP's envisioned coalition. The party's plan for a progressive-left front anchored by an uncompromising vision of politics and far-reaching platform attracted a number of the city's key activists and posed promise to many. At the same time, its imagined alliance was shaky from the start, with old patriarchal patterns threatening to overwhelm its proclamations otherwise. Its ability to reach would-be allies was limited as well. Most Black radicals were focused on building their own organizations guided by a more nationalist orientation or saw little practical need to work with white activists in a city over 70% African American. Others who shared the DCSP's anti-capitalist commitments judged it to be insufficiently revolutionary or lacking in ideological rigor, preferring membership in one

[40] "A Call to Action: A Convention of Federal Employees for Peace, Equality & Priorities," Committee on the Rights and Responsibilities of Federal Employees, 1972, Box 37, Hobson Papers; "Federal Employees Vigil for Peace on the Capital Steps," Federal Employees for Peace, 1971, Patrick Frazier Political and Social Movements Collection, American University Digital Research Archive; "Boycott Savings Bonds," Federal Employees for Peace, 1972, Frazier Collection; "Peace Referendum Rally," Federal Employees for Peace, 1971, Frazier Collection; "Women's commission on abortion & forced sterilization," Women's National Abortion Coalition, 1972, Frazier Collection; Claudia Levy, "Rally Here to Push Senate Rights Vote," *The Washington Post*, August 20, 1970; Ronald Kessler, "Ex-Officer Tells of Infiltrating Women's Movement," *The Washington Post*, February 15, 1975.

of the Communist or Trotskyist formations. Beyond this activist orbit lay the vast dominance of the Democratic Party, which many local reformers viewed as the only viable electoral vehicle, an assumption reinforced by the depth of its presence in Black churches and neighborhood clubs. Whether the DCSP could expand its base among the disaffected and speak to voters outside its highly committed movement circle was still to be tested.[41]

"A Party of Change, Not of Personalities": Electoral Campaigns and Internal Crises

During the fall of 1972 the DCSP pivoted back to the electoral arena, working to turn out votes for Cassell's delegate run as well as raise the party's profile among the electorate. Over the next several years the party's focus on recruiting and fielding candidates grew dramatically due to the expanded, albeit still limited, opportunities for political participation afforded by the shift to Home Rule. Experiencing its first electoral successes and employing public office as a bully pulpit for statehood, the DCSP at the same time struggled to maintain an effective organizational base and clear the hurdles required for continued ballot status. Once elected, its representatives confronted the dilemmas of carrying uncompromising stances within the bounds of conventional politics and securing traction on issues within a system more likely to advance individuals. The difficulties of sustaining a grassroots alternative to the deep-pocketed Democratic party, together with the death of Hobson in 1977, led to a decline in active campaigning by the decade's end. Party leaders Josephine Butler and Hilda Mason persevered, however, preserving a foothold within electoral politics while carrying forward the DCSP's link to movement-rooted struggles.

Cassell campaigned relentlessly, enlisting in fights that would simultaneously position him as an alternative to the establishment. He was arrested alongside eleven others for a lie-in on

[41] George Derek Musgrove, "Black Power Movement, 1966-76 Map," *Black Power in Washington, D.C. 1961-1998*, 2021, https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/5e17e7d1c4a8406b9eaf26a4eae77103/; Deborah Hanrahan, interview, December 29, 1998, Box 1, D.C. Statehood Movement Leaders Oral History Project, The People's Archive, DC Public Library.

the Senate floor in protest of the war; he joined members of the American Indian Movement overnight during their weeklong occupation of the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Together with welfare recipients, he interrupted the Council hearings where members approved new flat grants, cutting benefits to 45,000 families. His presence on the picket line during the teacher's strike, unexpected for an elected school board member, earned him the endorsement of the Washington Teacher's Union. Press exposure and activist support did little to dent the popular Democratic incumbent, though, who outraised the DC Statehood candidate by a 20:1 ratio. Cassell finished third in the delegate race, behind both Fauntroy and Republican challenger William Chin-Lee.[42]

That same night Nixon defeated McGovern in a landslide, with the antiwar candidate claiming only the District of Columbia and Massachusetts. Spock and Hobson's People's Party protest ticket fared much worse, failing to even gather enough signatures to secure a spot on the DC ballot. Any doubts as to the admiration many felt for Hobson were dispelled the following week, however, when over two thousand gathered in a hotel ballroom to pay tribute to the dying man. Reclining in a lounge chair and puffing on a cigar to settle his stomach, Hobson listened as longtime allies, fans, and erstwhile foes recounted his achievements and regaled his antics. The somber event displayed the breadth of his political commitments, with antiwar folk singer Joan Baez strumming the guitar and former mentee Stokely Carmichael delivering a moving speech. Even as master of ceremonies Bill Wendt reminded attendees that the evening was not a funeral, the sense that it was a moment to say goodbye was palpable to those present. Such feelings were further reinforced by The Washington Post, which had recently published a series of extended

[42] B.D. Colen, "Demonstrator's Choice: $125 Fine or 30 Days," *The Washington Post*, August 26, 1972; Paul Hodge, "Another Wounded Knee was Feared Friday Night," *The Washington Post*, November 5, 1972; Ron Taylor and J.Y. Smith, "Flat Grant Welfare Aid is Approved," *The Washington Post*, September 7, 1972; "Teachers Union Backs Cassell," *The Washington Post*, October 31, 1972; Martha Hamilton, "More than $80,00 Raised in Race," *The Washington Post*, October 29, 1972.

interviews with Hobson. Once casually dismissive of the activist as an angry and impractical militant, the paper was now recasting Hobson as an acerbic yet wise civil rights icon.[43]

The perception that Hobson was fading from the scene had begun to spread within the party as well, soon precipitating conflict. Though he had lost the delegate race, Cassell garnered more votes than Hobson had the year before and viewed himself as the logical choice for guiding the DCSP's future. The party, he asserted, was too loosely structured to be effective; its nine co-chairs and lack of clearly assigned roles only hampered its growth. With a stronger Executive Committee, it could build a truly citywide organization and begin to seriously contest elections. In a meeting that December, Cassell motioned to elect himself as chairman and install a slate of loyal allies as officers, succeeding in a vote that narrowly passed. Multiple founding members, however, described the proceedings as a takeover—noting how many of Cassell's supporters worked with him at Federal City College and had little if any previous involvement with the party. Initially agreeing to stay on as Executive Director, Butler resigned soon after.[44]

The rift within the DCSP grew wider that following spring, with Hobson's heir apparent Cassell and actual heir Julius Hobson Jr. heading the rival factions. Challenging the December reorganization, disaffected party members drew on the bylaws to call an emergency convention. At the May gathering, attended by approximately seventy-five, the elder Hobson offered a tearful and ultimately unfruitful plea for unity. After an extended debate in which he urged the party to recognize his leadership, Cassell and his supporters stormed out of the convention. Remaining

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[43] "Dr. Spock Off Ballot," *The Washington Post*, November 1, 1972; "An Evening to Honor Julius Hobson Souvenir Journal," November 14, 1972, Box 1, D.C. Statehood Party Records; Kirk Scharfenberg and Angela Terrell, "Hobson: 'Just Say I Never Expected it All," *The Washington Post*, November 15, 1972; Lillian Wiggins, "Julius Hobson Honored for his Crusading Deeds," *The Baltimore Afro-American*, November 25, 1972; "Julius Hobson: A Goad for Change," *The Washington Post*, July 2, 1972.

[44] "Proposed Statehood Party Structure, Officers, and Responsibilities," December 1972, Box 3, Sam Smith Papers; Martha Hamilton, "D.C. Statehood Party Reorganizes, Elects Officers, Plans Fund Drive," *The Washington Post*, December 13, 1972.

members then moved swiftly to elect new officers, Hobson Jr. among them. In subsequent weeks each contingent took to the airwaves, denouncing the other as a rump and declaring themselves the DCSP's true representatives. The core issue, Cassell charged, was the discomfort certain party members, both white and Black, felt towards having an all-Black leadership. Hobson Jr. responded that Cassell's ouster stemmed rather from his uncooperative style and poor attendance of party meetings. That both men planned to run for the School Board that fall further heightened the acrimony between them, continuing for several months before Cassell fully left the DCSP.[45]

With nearly six months spent fighting internal battles, during which in Sam Smith's estimation "the Statehood Party almost disappeared from the local scene," the party entered the second half of 1973 in bad shape. Conflict led to a shedding of dedicated volunteers; inactivity resulted in a decline of new recruits. Struggling to find their footing, members regrouped that summer around efforts to support prisoners revolting against the deplorable conditions of the 100-year-old DC Jail. The previous fall, inmates at the jail overtook a cell block and claimed eleven hostages, including nine guards and Corrections Director Kenneth Hardy. Referencing the Attica rebellion and the Soledad Brothers, the imprisoned activists demanded their freedom and decried the jail's overcrowding, inedible food, and dangerous placement of juveniles with adults. The 22-hour standoff ended after an emergency midnight court hearing and a signed letter from Hardy vowing no reprisals. That summer, as a federal grand jury investigated the incident—and as promises of amnesty fell to the wayside—DCSP co-chairs Hobson Jr. and Dick Brown led a series of press conferences and pickets outside the jail marshalling support for participants in the uprising. Party members were also key to the formation of The D.C. Coalition for the Survival of D.C. Prisoners, an ad hoc group formed to protect the protestors and ensure their reforms were

[45] Sam Smith, "Statehood Party Regroups," *DC Gazette*, May 23, 1973; Martha Hamilton, "2 Factions Battling in Statehood Party," *The Washington Post*, July 15, 1973; Solomon, *Washington Century*, 245-246.

implemented. The coalition sought to assert public pressure for amnesty throughout the fall, with Hobson Sr. addressing a September rally attended by over 300.[46]

Hobson's appearance at the rally in support of the prisoners signaled a surprising turn—he was getting better. Acupuncture alleviated much of the pain he felt from collapsed vertebrae, enabling him to walk at times as well as wean off the 60 milligrams of morphine he was taking per day. Doing so not only brought back his mental acuity but was reported as rescuing his marriage, which was suffering due to frequent bouts of morphine-induced paranoia. More astonishingly, Hobson's cancer went into remission, with doctors unable to detect the cancer cells which had diminished his size and drained his energy over the previous two years. Hobson intended to put his new lease on life to good use—announcing in October he would run for a seat on the D.C. City Council before Home Rule legislation was even formally approved.[47]

Signed into law on Christmas Eve 1973, the District of Columbia Home Rule Act ended the presidentially appointed local government authorized by Johnson's reorganization plan only six years before, replacing it with an elected mayor and thirteen-member city council. While the act delegated law-making powers to the new local government, it retained the right of legislative review, allowing Congress to overturn statutes which lacked its approval within 30-60 days. The Home Rule charter also maintained Congressional authority over the city's budget and limited its ability to alter planning and zoning rules or reform its court system or criminal code. Crucially the bill preserved an annual federal payment to the city for its use of municipal services; at the

[46] Smith, "Statehood Party Regroups"; Selma Rain, "DC Jail protests Continue," DC *Statehood Party Newsletter*, August 1973, Box 1, D.C. Statehood Party Records; Ronald Taylor, "Probe of Uprising at District Jail is Assailed," *The Washington Post*, July 22, 1973; Jacqueline Bolder, "Jail Rape Victim Rips System," *Evening Star*, September 9, 1973; "Hobson in solidarity with D.C. prisoners: 1973," *Washington Area Spark*, January 28, 2020, https://www.flickr.com/photos/washington_area_spark/47085765362/.

[47] J.Y. Smith, "Hobson's 'Miraculous Gain," *The Washington Post*, April 8, 1973; Kirk, "Hobson: Cancer Has Abated," *The Washington Post*, October 31, 1973; Stephen Klaidman, "Hobson's Illness 'Cured' Marriage," *The Washington Post*, August 21, 1975; Solomon, *Washington Century*, 234-239.

same time it explicitly barred the council from implementing a commuter tax. As part of the act—and an incremental step towards increased self-governance—DC voters were required to hold an up-or-down referendum on the charter and its stipulations, to be held later that spring.[48]

Preserving the District's unequal status even as it advanced opportunities for political participation, the Home Rule charter was unsurprisingly met with disdain by the members of the DCSP, who dismissed the act as "Home Fool." At the party's third annual convention in March, members endorsed a 'NO' resolution on the referendum, "declining to add its name to those who are about to approve a local government which is an insult to the people of D.C." Nevertheless, members expressed support for the referendum's second order question on the establishment of Advisory Neighborhood Councils (ANCs), elected neighborhood-level bodies that provide input to the City Council and Executive Branch and oversee the distribution of grants within their area. A concept similar to one prescribed in their 1972 platform, the party qualified its 'YES' motion by noting the limits of the proposed ANC system, which lacked decision making authority and excluded youth and non-citizens, vowing to "work for real neighborhood government" over the long haul. A more joyous occasion than the previous year's convention, attendees also celebrated Hobson Sr.'s return to active political life and unanimously endorsed his council run.[49]

That the DCSP rejected the Home Rule charter while at the same time embracing the new outlets it enabled signaled the tough spot its uncompromising statehood position placed it within. While running candidates for council amounted to a tacit endorsement of the new arrangement, complete abstention would only ensure the party's irrelevance and further bury its message. The party reconciled its participation by committing its candidates to stump for immediate statehood

[48] District of Columbia Self-Government and Governmental Reorganization Act, Pub. L. No. 93-198 Stat. 87.
[49] DC Statehood Party, "Notice of Officers, Resolutions, and Endorsements," March 1974, Box 3, Sam Smith Papers; Raul Ramirez, "Statehood Party Backs Hobson as Councilman," *The Washington Post*, March 4, 1974.

and reiterate the indignities of continued Congressional control. The Democratic establishment's equivocation on pursing statehood further convinced the party of the need to offer an alternative to its monopoly. In this effort the DCSP was aided by the charter itself, which dictated that no party was allowed to have more than two representatives among the four at-large council seats. As Hobson summed it up in his endorsement speech: "I think we've got a viable party in the District of Columbia and I think that the way these damned fools have written the law we can win a seat or two." Several months later the party endorsed Butler for the second at-large seat.[50]

While the charter's stipulations produced favorable conditions for the DCSP in certain instances, it created nearly insurmountable obstacles in others. Election rules mandated that a candidate seeking their party's nomination for an at-large seat must gather 2,000 signatures *or* 1% of registered party voters; those seeking their party's nomination for a ward-based seat must gather 250 signatures from registered party voters. The problem with this regulation was that the DCSP lacked 250 registered members in any one ward. With a registered membership of 675 in February the party could stand up at-large candidates with a handful of signatures; its ward-level endorsements would need to drum up dozens of new members in order to appear on the ballot with the party line. Ward one candidate Armando Rendon, author of *The Chicano Manifesto* and a defector from local Democratic Central Committee, cast the problem as not only logistical but psychological: most people he approached assumed the Democratic Party was the only party worth registering for given that its primary would function as the *de facto* race. Rendon and ward three candidate Carleen Joyce, active with the Washington Free Clinic, held frequent coffee

[50] DC Statehood Party, "Notice of Officers, Resolutions, and Endorsements"; Ramirez, "Statehood Party Backs Hobson."

klatches and spaghetti dinners to register new voters and gather nominating signatures. Between these and other registration drives, the DCSP nearly doubled its membership by July.[51]

The party further endorsed 24-year-old activist Anton Wood for delegate, who openly acknowledged his chances of besting Fauntroy were slim and that his main goal was to stump for statehood, and Sam Smith for council chairman, who quickly demurred from the nomination. It also had to decide how to respond to newcomers, including those whose main interest in the DCSP was its official ballot status. At its July assembly the party declined to endorse several who sought its support for mayor, preferring not to divide its energies backing candidates with which it had little connection. Members also adopted an abridged and slightly revised platform at the meeting, one that maintained many of its radical prescriptions for the city while recognizing the circumscribed role that the council could play in their achievement given Home Rule's limits. At the top of the platform, of course, stood the party's demand that the council act immediately to overcome these barriers by petitioning Congress for statehood.[52]

In the leadup to the election the party organized a month of statehood-related events, beginning with Statehood Day on October 5, 1974. Delivering a proclamation on the steps of the District Building—re-christened as the "State Capitol"—Butler declared "the goal of the people of the city of Washington to achieve self-government under Statehood by July 4, 1976." After an address from Hobson, DCSP members unveiled a 51-star flag and planted a Statehood Tree. The party also officially launched a petition to the United Nations for redress and expressed solidarity with the "Sister-Colony of Puerto Rico" at a linked event held in Adams Morgan, which was

[51] Paul W. Valentine, "Hobson to Run for D.C. Council," *The Washington Post*, February 21, 1974; Lewis Jones, "Candidate Seeks Cash, 250 Names," *The Washington Post*, July 6, 1974.
[52] Jay Mathews, "6 Named for City Elections," *The Washington Post*, June 17, 1974; Megan Rosenfeld, "Statehood Party Backing Sought," *The Washington Post*, May 15, 1974; DC Statehood Party, "The DC Statehood Party 1974 Campaign Platform," June 1974, Box 3, Sam Smith Papers.

home to a sizeable Latinx community. Calling the city to join them at a November "statehood assembly" to strategize next steps, the party hoped the events would also draw voters toward the DCSP in the meantime.[53]

Despite these publicity efforts, Hobson was the sole member of the DCSP elected on November 5th, sailing on name recognition to an at-large council seat alongside Democrats Marion Barry and Doug Moore. Butler's tireless community service and deep grasp of policy solutions were not enough to overcome the push of well-funded campaigns or pull of charismatic leadership; she finished in 8th place, two spots behind former party member Cassell, who ran for an at-large seat as an independent. Rendon and Joyce, ultimately unable to meet the mark of 250 registered DCSP members per ward, lost their legal appeal to appear on the ballot and made little headway as write-ins. Woods' largely symbolic run for delegate finished a distant fourth.[54]

In January, Hobson was sworn into the inaugural elected council alongside twelve others, over half of whom were well known civil rights activists in the city and had frequently worked side by side, if not always harmoniously. Veterans of the Urban League, CORE, SNCC, NWRO, and other groups, the new councilmembers now found themselves on the other side of the dais, tasked with governing institutions they were more used to confronting. Acknowledging the hard realities the council would face managing an under-resourced city amidst rising inflation and unemployment, Chairman Sterling Tucker's swearing-in speech conceded "we will work no major miracles." Moving from the margin to the center of the power structure required not only an adjustment of outlook but also style, even for those with hopes of reforming it from within.

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[53] DC Statehood Party, "Proclamation for Statehood Day," October 5, 1974, Box 3, Sam Smith Papers; DC Statehood Party, "Statehood Day Schedule of Events," October 5, 1974, Box 3, Sam Smith Papers.
[54] Sam Smith, "Wading Through the Candidates," *D.C. Gazette*, November 1974; Megan Rosenfeld, "Candidates Step Up Campaign Pace," *The Washington Post*, July 29, 1974; Eugene L. Meyer, "D.C. Write-In Votes Supported by Court," *The Washington Post*, August 14, 1974; Corrie M. Anders, "Will Council's Big Stars Create a Winning Team?" *Evening Star*, November 7, 1974.

While this shift from protest to politics was smooth for some—most notably Barry, who would propel his four years on the council into four terms as mayor—it was less so for Hobson, who did not take well to the world of bartering and compromise. Squandering political capital in the council's first business meeting, he threatened to sue for violation of the separation of church and state if one of his fellow members opened the session with prayer. Uncomfortable wrangling for votes when logic should suffice, Hobson introduced a single bill his first six months in office.[55]

Hobson was more at ease, however, chairing the council's education committee, a role which enabled him to resume his earlier work keeping an eye on the school system. With a wide-ranging purview and dedicated staff, he relished the opportunity to grill administrators regarding student outcomes. Ironically, among those he would call to testify was his own son, who served on the school board and chaired its finance committee. Despite their contrasting styles—Hobson Jr. was as restrained as his father was strident—the two worked together to prevent proposed cuts to the education budget and tighten up the equalization formulas mandated in the wake of their successful 1967 lawsuit. Once the lead plaintiffs against the schools and now the elected officials tasked with overseeing them, the Hobsons' collaboration comprised something of a full circle.[56]

Hobson also utilized his perch on the council to push forward his other signature issue, introducing a statehood bill in January 1976 that won the backing of all but one of his colleagues. The legislation called for a citywide referendum on statehood, which if successful would trigger a constitutional convention for drafting the new body's constitution and a commission dedicated to the technical aspects of the transition. After initially signing on to the measure, however, the

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[55] LaBarbara Bowman and Jay Mathews, "New D.C. Council Reunites Warriors of Activist Days," *The Washington Post*, November 7, 1974; LaBarbara Bowman, "Mayor, Council Sworn In," *The Washington Post*, January 3, 1975; LaBarbara Bowman, "Council Meetings to Begin with Moment of Silence," *The Washington Post*, January 7, 1975; Solomon, *Washington Century*, 267-268. Several bills Hobson later sponsored became law: the first mandated accessibility in new buildings and required curb cuts in sidewalks, an issue that stemmed from his own experience using a wheelchair; the second barred defense attorneys from introducing an assault victim's past sexual history.
[56] Dianne Brockett, "The Hobsons, Father and Son, Have Grip on D.C. Schools," *Evening Star*, February 26, 1976.

council tabled the bill indefinitely later that year, with those who had supported it contending any discussion of statehood could imperil Fauntroy's concurrent appeal for full voting rights. While the setback led Hobson to charge that his fellow councilmembers' support for self-determination was "mealy-mouthed," public opinion was beginning to shift in favor of statehood, with even the *Post* editorial board conceding that "statehood does seem a perfectly reasonable objective, and one that is becoming more and more appealing to a lot of people as the years go by."[57]

Unfortunately for the DCSP, growing support for the cause of statehood did not translate into victory at the polls for its most consistent champions. Aided by a board of elections ruling that repealed the 250 signature requirement for ward-level candidates, the party backed Aronica for delegate, Butler for at-large, Michael Lewis for ward two, and Gregory Rowe for ward four in the 1976 race. In addition to statehood, candidates touted the party's plans for pursuing full employment and providing healthcare to all in the District through implementing a progressive tax structure. Doubling her tally from two years prior to nearly 24,000 votes, Butler placed third after Barry and Republican Jerry Moore, incumbents who had served two years instead of four in order to establish staggered terms on the council. The DCSP's other candidates trailed much farther behind, confirming the difficulty of shaking third party status in a one party own.[58]

Several months later the party would suffer a greater loss. In January, Hobson announced that the cancer had returned; the chemotherapy he was taking for multiple myeloma cruelly led to acute leukemia. His condition steadily worsened in the ensuing weeks as he shuffled between his council office and the hospital. Hobson died on March 23, 1977, at the age of fifty-seven. At

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[57] Paul W. Valentine, "Bill for D.C. Statehood Backed," *The Washington Post*, February 26, 1976; "Council Bill on Statehood," *The Washington Post*, September 30, 1976; "Strategies for Statehood," *The Washington Post*, November 23, 1976.

[58] LaBarbara Bowman, "Elections Qualifying is Easier," *The Washington Post*, July 30, 1976; LaBarbara Bowman, "City Council Primary Balloting is Tuesday," *The Washington Post*, September 9, 1976; "Ward 4 Council member," *The Washington Post*, October 28, 1976; "Maryland, Virginia, D.C. Election Charts," *The Washington Post*, November 3, 1976.

his memorial service, attended by over nine hundred, family, friends, and fellow councilmembers offered eulogies shorn of conventional pieties. A second celebration the following year focused specifically on Hobson's activist contributions and the many organizations he animated. Asked in an interview shortly before his death how he would respond if he met his Maker, Hobson shrugged off the question as a ridiculous one given his atheistic outlook. Further pressed, Hobson promised that if he did in fact meet God, he would take him to task for the world's injustice.[59]

Hailed as a miracle, Hobson's temporary reprieve made possible his successful council run and helped consolidate the DCSP's place on the city's political map. At the same time it left the party over reliant on a single persona and forestalled the cultivation of other representatives. Following his death, a new crisis enveloped the party over who would temporarily succeed him on the council prior to the special election in July. First his son Hobson Jr. and then his spouse Tina declared their interest; both claimed to be fulfilling their loved one's dying wishes. While Hobson Jr. soon withdrew his name from consideration with little explanation, Tina remained resolute, while at the same time declaring she had no plans to run in July. The party's central committee weighed their options at a tense four-hour meeting on April 1, voting on both who to temporarily appoint to the seat and who to endorse for the special election. Choosing between Butler, Hobson, and school board member Hilda Mason, the party voted on the second round to endorse Mason for each. The fallout from the decision was swift, with Hobson characterizing debate over whether a white candidate was politically viable as "reverse racism" and announcing

[59] J.Y. Smith, "Doctors Give Hobson Six Months to Live," *The Washington Post*, January 6, 1977; Cynthia Gorney, "Eulogies Praise Raging Spirit of Julius Hobson," *The Washington Post*, March 28, 1977; "A Celebration of the Life of Julius Hobson Booklet," June 2, 1978, Box 20, Josephine Butler Papers; Marilyn Robinson, dir., *Julius Hobson: The Great Gadfly*. Washington, DC: WRC-TV, 1977.

her withdrawal from the party. Committee members responded that Mason was not only the best choice on merits but needed the three months of council service to secure victory in July.[60]

Mason went on to win the special election three months later, narrowly defeating Barbara Sizemore, the former D.C. Superintendent with whom she had sparred frequently while on the school board. The party's sole elected official, Mason served as its public face alongside Butler, who chaired the organization from 1977 onward. Behind the scenes they were supported by party stalwarts Aronica, Waxman, and Wood as well as a second generation of leadership that included Richard Bruning, a prison reform activist and member of the Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee; Debbie Hanrahan, the driving force of the local United Farm Worker's grape boycott campaign and former head of Hobson's office; and Samuel Jordan, a union official who was part of the ECTC's fight against freeways as a young adult. Experiencing a momentary resurgence, the DCSP started meeting biweekly and embarked on several new initiatives, among them an ambitious effort to recruit and organize new party members at the ward level.[61]

Even as it steeled itself for its second chapter, the party faced growing perceptions of its political irrelevance by the latter 1970s. The DCSP's 1,500 registered voters, while double that of its membership in the first election four years earlier, were dwarfed by the Democratic Party's 195,000. With the ability to secure ballot status on the party's line with only a handful of votes, the central committee spent as much time fending off candidacies it viewed as illegitimate as it did campaigning for those it supported. Although Mason was able to secure her re-election in

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[60] "Executive Committee Report to Central Committee Meeting," April 1, 1977, Box 1, D.C. Statehood Party Records, "D.C. Statehood Party Special Central Committee Meeting Draft Minutes," April 1, 1977, Box 3, Sam Smith Papers; William Jobes, "Hilda Mason Gets Interim Post," *Evening Star*, April 3, 1977; Juan Williams and Milton Coleman, "Hilda Mason to Fill Council Seat," *The Washington Post*, April 3, 1977; "Tina Hobson Changes Voter Registration," *The Washington Post*, April 7, 1977; Solomon, *Washington Century*, 278-279.

[61] Thomas Morgan, "Mason Wins Council Seat in Final Tally," *The Washington Post*, July 27, 1977; "Press Release on Officer Elections," March 2, 1977, Box 1, D.C. Statehood Party Records; "D.C. Statehood Party Central Committee Members," October 16, 1979, Box 1, D.C. Statehood Party Records; "Central Committee Meeting Minutes," March 07, 1978, Box 1, D.C. Statehood Party Records.

1978, none of the party's other nominees even came close to contesting their races, including a recently reunited Cassell who ran for council chairman. Beyond these electoral setbacks, Barry's ascendance as mayor—whose campaign commandeered the energies and imaginations of many of the city's social reformers—furthered the impression among some that the party was being outflanked on the left. Objecting to press assertions that the DCSP was moribund, party leaders at the same time acknowledged the persistent challenges they faced in the political arena, citing both the loss of someone with Hobson's stature and their steady focus on education, an issue which though critical to quality of life generally failed to gain them new voters.[62]

Senate passage of the D.C. Voting Rights Amendment in August 1978, spurred on by Fauntroy and a coalition of local and national liberal groups, also placed the DCSP at a strategic impasse. Sent to the states for ratification, the legislation provided the District with congressional representation and participation in the electoral college and constitutional amendment process "as though it were a state." Concurrently, Fauntroy began a push for budgetary autonomy for the city. Like Home Rule, the party perceived the amendment and budget proposal as half-measures in comparison to statehood; at the same time it wanted to avoid being seen as spoilsports. DCSP leaders were split on how to respond: while most stayed on the sidelines and Mason voiced her qualified support, Aronica and Jordan met with Maryland and Virginia state legislators in their capacity "as individuals," urging them to drop the amendment and instead press for statehood.[63]

The different postures party leaders took towards the Voting Rights Amendment reflected broader divergences within the DCSP, particularly concerning its relationship to the city's

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[62] Milton Coleman, "Statehood Party Loses Political Clout," *The Washington Post*, March 1, 1979; "Central Committee Meeting Minutes," June 25, 1978, Box 1, D.C. Statehood Party Records; "Guide to Candidates," 1978, Box 1, D.C. Statehood Party Records; Laura Murray, "All Goes as Expected in Race for Council Seats," *Evening Star*, November 8, 1978.

[63] Coleman, "Statehood Party Loses Political Clout"; Diane Brockett, "A New Hurdle for D.C. Amendment," *Evening Star*, February 19, 1979; "Central Committee Meeting Minutes," March 07, 1978.

Democratic establishment. While some central committee members advocated an antagonistic stance towards Fauntroy and the council that emphasized public accountability, others urged a consensus-building approach intended to pull the Democrats in a progressive direction. One of thirteen councilmembers and an honorary member of the Democratic bloc, Mason preferred the latter. As meeting minutes relay, tensions soon rose within the group over whether she was doing enough to push the party's distinct platform or get her fellow DCSP candidates elected. Butler's lack of electoral success despite all her organizational efforts, only reinforced such concerns. At the same time, party leadership were hesitant to alienate their sole elected representative.[64]

Mason's overtures toward Democrats, including campaigning and fundraising alongside them at times, were also a concession to the DCSP's depleted resources. Funded by individual donations and irregular proceeds from rummage sales, the party often rant out of money, falling behind on its office rent and struggling to pay for campaign mailings. Its core group of roughly a dozen central committee members regularly took on too much, agreeing to projects that vastly outstripped their capacity to carry them out, resulting in burnout and frequent turnover. Plans to restructure the party so that each single member district of the ANCs would be represented in its decision-making were unwieldy; they also failed to materialize when few new faces showed up at meetings. Already stretched thin, party members voted at the annual convention in February 1979 to begin a major recruitment drive with the aim of placing a statehood referendum on the ballot the following year. Yet in declaring the referendum as top priority, the party also tacitly acknowledged its strategic retreat from fielding a slate of candidates with the aspiration of being competitive. While continuing to back one or two candidates per cycle, often with the expressed

[64] "Central Committee Meeting Minutes," September 20, 1977, Box 1, D.C. Statehood Party Records; "Central Committee Meeting Minutes," December 11, 1978, Box 1, D.C. Statehood Party Records; Hanrahan, interview.

goal of promoting statehood or simply preserving official ballot status, the DCSP's attempts to foster a thoroughgoing progressive alternative for the District were coming to a close. [65]

The DCSP's limited electoral success tended to overshadow its persistent commitment to street protest and movement-rooted politics, an act of endurance which comprised a feat in and of itself. Butler and Mason represented the party at countless rallies and demonstrations in the capital, including those voicing opposition to attempts to overturn affirmative action, working to initiate a freeze on nuclear weapons, and fighting to ensure the rights of working-class women. Like Hobson's work with The People's Party, each also maintained ties to national formations, with Butler offering leadership in several Communist Party USA linked initiatives and Mason one of the few elected officials to carry membership in the Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee. The party also took seriously its role as hosts, whether serving on the welcoming committee for The Longest Walk, a transcontinental trek led by the American Indian Movement, or endorsing the first National March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights. Unable to prevent the rising tide of reaction symbolized by Reagan's election in 1980, the DCSP joined others bearing witness against it, remaining dedicated to its movement roots despite prevailing impulses on the electoral left urging a march towards the center.[66]

Established in 1970 out of a desire to construct a "majority party in the District for the dispossessed"—one that could profit from Home Rule's advancements even as it challenged its

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[65] "Central Committee Meeting Minutes," March 07, 1978; "Central Committee Meeting Minutes," March 15, 1978, Box 1, D.C. Statehood Party Records; "Central Committee Meeting Minutes," August 21, 1979, Box 1, D.C. Statehood Party Records; Hanrahan, interview; "D.C. Statehood Party Sets Goal for 1980," *Evening Star*, February 25, 1979; Eugene Robinson, "In Council Races, Democratic Affiliation Is Main Asset**,"** *The Washington Post*, October 25, 1980.

[66] Marcy Rein, "bakke to the streets," *Off Our Backs*, May 1978; Margie Crow, "nukes vs. anti-nukes: malignant monster meets critical mass movement," *Off Our Backs*, May 1979; Janis Kelly, "women in the workplace," *Off Our Backs*, April 1980; "Conference: Fight Back Against Racism and the Organized Right," *The WREE-view: Bulletin of Women for Racial and Economic Equality*, Independent Voices, Reveal Digital, JSTOR; "Central Committee Meeting Minutes," July 9, 1978, Box 1, D.C. Statehood Party Records; Cad, "gays, christians march," *Off Our Backs*, October 1979.

limits—the DCSP exited the decade facing diminished prospects for its political project. Mason was able to retain Hobson's seat on the council, ultimately serving for over two decades, but her longevity owed more to the power of incumbency and city charter restrictions than the party that backed her, which was unable to propel any other of its candidates to elected office. The closed Democratic primary and the foregone conclusions it produced for general elections in the District convinced a majority of voters that the action was elsewhere than the DCSP, whatever they may have thought of its platform or candidates. Yet while the group could be dismissed as another third party which failed to gain much political traction, it also profoundly shifted the ground on its signature issue, transforming statehood from unattainable dream to widely endorsed objective.

"A Militant Approach to Issues": The DCSP's Strategies for Transformation

The DCSP's efforts to wed street protest and the pursuit of state power across the 1970s were emblematic of a national push among the New Left towards electoral politics. The party's emergence also spoke to unique conditions within what Sam Smith cast as the "Captive Capital," including the dam of energies that burst amidst the shift to Home Rule. In seeking to coalesce a citywide popular front that could transform movement demands into durable policy, the DCSP confronted a series of strategic questions: what would be the basis for its coalition, helping to bind together a diverse set of interests, ideological perspectives, and embodied experiences? How would the party scale up from a small circle of activists fighting community struggles—such as those thwarting freeways or targeting a discriminatory employer—to a formidable and disciplined political organization that encompassed thousands? What might inspire voters to forgo registration in the Democratic Party despite the consequential nature of it closed primary? Finally, what did the DCSP hope to accomplish if its candidates overcame these obstacles and

claimed elected office? The ways the party approached and sought to resolve these matters challenge certain historiographic conventions even as they confirm others.

The party's formation in the waning years of the Black Power and antiwar movements, let alone its persistence for decades beyond its founding, offers a counterpoint to depictions of the period as predominated by fracture. While intellectually driven portraits of the New Left often relay examples of identitarian retreat or ideological sectarianism, describing movements in disarray by the mid-1970s, these reductive narrative tropes fail to account for the multiple ways that on-the-ground activists sought to respond to the era's losses and reversals. Even as others were going their own way, and often with good reasons, the DCSP undertook an ambitious effort to unite Black and white, women and men, queer and straight, and leftists and progressive liberals behind a robust agenda for the city's remaking. Its sprawling platform and carefully planned conventions reflected its aspirations for cementing new forms of alliance across these differences, even if it struggled at times to heed such commitments in practice. Too easily dismissed as sideshows, the attempts to create third party alternatives attentive to the contentious desires of social movements such as the DCSP and The People's Party remain understudied, to the detriment of both New Left historiography and contemporary left political strategy.[67]

The party's commitment to building a multiracial political formation, while indicative of its founders' ideological commitments, is also partially elucidated by generational difference. Butler, Hobson, and Mason were 10-25 years older than the SNCC veterans and other young Black Power radicals who took DC by storm. Each came of age amidst the first wave of largely integrated desegregation battles in the 1940s; they were also less personally invested in the younger cohort's commitment to revolutionary cultural self-definition. Nevertheless, they were

[67] For examples of such treatments, see Kazin, *American Dreamers*; Rossinow, *Visions of Progress*; Rodgers, *The Age of Fracture*.

all publicly associated with race and gender struggles, solidly on the left, and fully immersed in movement circles comprised largely of people half their age. As a result, the DCSP became a refuge for younger white activists seeking Black guidance and multiracial camaraderie, a trend that adversely impacted the party's ability to attract Black recruits in their 20-30s. More attuned to calls for complete independence, such as that put forth by BLM, many also perceived a fine line between integration and a desire for white acceptance. Hobson's replies to criticisms of white activists made by younger Black voices tended to deflect the contradictions of multiracial movement building rather than address them directly, a cavalier stance many found wanting. In this sense, the party leadership's diversity of race and age masked deeper ambivalences.[68]

The party's diversity extended to the ideological perspectives of its central committee members, who identified variously as Black nationalists, socialists, feminists, radical democrats, anarchic localists, and liberal true believers. Avoiding the doctrinaire developments gaining strength at the time, the DCSP preferred to focus on issues, with the prior experiences of its members picketing stores, supporting tenants, and coordinating strikes taking precedent over any particular philosophy. What this often amounted to in practice was a militant liberalism, one which combined spectacular forms of protest with the pursuit of concrete reforms. An approach rooted in the prior decade's successes—who, for instance, could forget Hobson's Rat Wagon and the near instant funding of rat abatement programs it attained from the city government—tactics of confrontation and disruption experienced diminishing returns by the early 1970s as the shock wore off and news media turned elsewhere. The DCSP's militant liberalism was also little match for machine style politics when it came to elections, which continued to be won through donation bundles and ballot drives rather than publicity stunts. With a toolkit more useful for wresting

[68] Smith, *Captive Capital*, 244-245; Smith, "Statehood Party Regroups"; Hanrahan, interview.

concessions than placing you in the position to offer them, the party struggled to overcome its outsider status in the eyes of the public, more often preserving its rebellious image.[69]

While the party's ability to attract new members was initially more about the hard-won credibility of its founders than assent to its ideas, they did hope that their unequivocal stance on statehood for the District would help them to stand out and draw principled voters away from the Democratic Party. According to the DCSP, the case for statehood was straightforward: residents of the nation's capital were denied rights that other US citizens enjoyed, holding a fundamentally inferior status which neither constitutional precedent nor political calculation could justify. To delay rectifying that status, even for the tactical purpose of pursuing equivalent privileges, was to be complicit in the colonial subjection of over 750,000. Tapping into a quintessentially American idiom, the DCSP cast statehood as a fulfillment of revolutionary era ideals, shrewdly timing their appeal in line with the Bicentennial. Yet in claiming the mantle of American freedom, the party at the same time took on that tradition's troubling aporias, including the indelible link between liberty and colonial dispossession. The party's statements on Puerto Rico acknowledged these contradictions, expressing support for the island's right to self-determination whether that took the form of independence, statehood, or something else; in relation to continental imperialism its actions in solidarity with Native treaty rights were farther advanced than its patriotic discourse.[70]

The DCSP further cast statehood as constituent of the ongoing Black freedom struggle. The denial of statehood to the District was ultimately a function of racial domination, yet another manifestation of African Americans' unequal access to citizenship. Through "the creation of the

[69] On the politics of "militant gay liberalism" see Christina Hanhardt, *Safe Space: Gay Neighborhood History and the Politics of Violence* (Durham: Duke, 2013), 81-116; on the "radicalized liberalism" of the New Left see Gosse, *Rethinking the New Left*, 191-194.
[70] On the contradictions at the core of the American political tradition see Aziz Rana, *The Two Faces of American Freedom* (Cambridge: Harvard, 2010). On the concept of continental imperialism see Manu Karuka, *Empire's Tracks: Indigenous Nations, Chinese Workers, and the Transcontinental Railroad* (Berkeley: California, 2010).

first predominantly Black sovereign state," party materials claimed, "the nation's Black residents [could begin to] burst free of the tyranny of the white majority." Granting statehood to a largely Black city would begin to address the bitter fragmentation facing the country in the 1970s and provide a model for improved race relations. Its addresses also linked the city's struggles to its lack of rule over its own affairs: "It is the very lack of true self-government in the District of Columbia that lies at the heart of the many problems facing us each day, among them housing, education, health care, police protection, transportation, and employment." Even conceding a fair amount to rhetorical flourish, the slippages between statehood, self-government, and self-determination remain evident in such statements. Recognizing the ways that white dominance and rural bias at the state level shape the fortunes of other US cities, would altered constitutional status have enabled Washington to evade the multiple devastating forces impinging upon urban centers in the 1970-80s or merely dampen them? Without engaging in counterfactuals, it appears that the promises invested in statehood by the DCSP exceeded its transformative potential.[71]

This somewhat idealistic view of state power, seemingly incongruent with the cynicism Hobson and others in the DCSP expressed towards the power structure, can be better understood within the context of the previous decade's civil rights gains and Great Society legislation. Party members took for granted not only the capacity of the state to act as an agent of redress but also the likelihood of continued social progress. Given the opportunity to directly shape policy with the shift to Home Rule, however qualified or partial, party members were all in. Having closely observed and constantly prodded the appointed council for years, they also believed they could do better. Yet while the inaugural elected council quickly set about putting their own stamp on the city, passing a number of considerable reforms, Hobson came to see public office as limited

[71] "How Does the D.C. Statehood Party Affect You?"; "Proclamation for Statehood Day."

when it came to initiating change. At best it could secure it, and ultimately he regarded his time pushing from the outside as more consequential than his service on the council. This perception, of course, may have been different had the party established a stronger presence in the District Building, with an entire bloc backing its bills instead of a single member. Conversations were also just beginning among elected officials linked with the New Left about how to leverage the power of state and local policy when Hobson died. It is worth asking, though, whether the energy the DCSP invested in elections and maintaining its internal apparatus may have been better spent advancing community-level struggles, particularly given the political headwinds they faced.[72]

Electoral campaigning also placed a focus on the individual over the collective as agent of change, further reinforcing unequal power dynamics within the party. While Hobson's frank speech and gruff reputation were not qualities traditionally associated with a charismatic leader, he was magnetic all the same, and many deferred to his authority. Weathering the successorship storm upon his passing, the DCSP still continued to live within Hobson's shadow, with its print materials describing him as "Permanent President" years later. Even as she at times perpetuated the veneration of Hobson, Butler was highly critical of efforts to elevate a select group of Black leaders and the gendered assumptions betrayed by such goals. In a 1980 opinion piece evocative of Ella Baker, she wrote "I believe that every oppressed person is a leader or potential leader… enough of this 'black leader' foolishness." The cost of hewing too closely to any one individual's legacy became clear the following year, when the *Post* revealed Hobson's role as a confidential FBI source from 1961-1966, during which he provided them with insider knowledge on multiple

[72] Solomon, *Washington Century*, 274; On elected officials associated with the New Left and efforts to advance progressive aims at the state and local level, see the digitized records of the Conference on Alternative State and Local Policies: Conference on Alternative State and Local Policies, Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections Cornell University Library, https://ecommons.cornell.edu/handle/1813/40499.

organizations and demonstrations. Initially disbelieved by many close to him, the evidence of his collaboration was considerable, and cast a troubling cloud over the entirety of his activism.[73]

Mason broke the mold of the charismatic Black male leader, proving policy expertise and persistent commitment to be viable qualities on the campaign trail. The consolidation of her role on the council, however, coincided with the demise of the DCSP as a political force, revealing the divergent fates of the party and that of its sole elected official. Facing mounting losses at the polls, the DCSP reaffirmed its emphasis on advancing issues rather than individual candidates. This commitment would soon be put to the test, as others outside the party's immediate orbit took up the statehood cause as their own.[74]

Statehood Goes Citywide: The Constitutional Convention and Congressional Obstruction

Drawing on the recently passed Initiative Referendum and Recall Act—among the last bills Hobson introduced before his death—the DCSP endorsed the goal of placing a referendum on statehood before the electorate the following year. The February 1979 resolution remained in the somewhat hazy realm of pronouncement, however, until Ed Guinan forced the party's hand five months later. A former priest and co-founder of the Community for Creative Non-Violence (see chapter four), Guinan viewed Congressional control over the city's legislation and taxation powers as a barrier to substantively addressing local poverty. Borrowing elements from

[73] "Dearest and Best Friend of Statehood," January 25, 1985, Box 3, Sam Smith Papers; "Josephine Butler, "Black Leadership?" *The Washington Afro-American*, August 30, 1980; on charisma and Black political life, see Erica R. Edwards, *Charisma and the Fictions of Black Leadership* (Minneapolis: Minnesota, 2012). Paul W. Valentine, "FBI Records List Julius Hobson As Confidential Source," *The Washington Post*, May 22, 1981; "Julius Hobson smear, a low blow," *The Washington Afro-American*, May 30, 1981. Disagreement remains over the motivations behind Hobson's willingness to work with the FBI, with his wife Tina claiming he enjoyed misleading the agents and one of his former Bureau contacts citing his desire to preempt any violence that might set back the larger cause of civil rights. The file relays a single payment to Hobson, used to fund his stay in Atlantic City during the 1964 Democratic National Convention. J. Edgar Hoover ordered agents to drop him as a source in June 1966 after Hobson complained about the FBI to the press. Adding further interpretive perplexity, it was Hobson's own lawsuit against the FBI (*Hobson v. Wilson*) that led the records to come to light, an outcome he would have known was likely.

[74] On the charismatic male leader as a dominant narrative structure within modern Black politics, see Erica R. Edwards, *Charisma and the Fictions of Black Leadership* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012).

Hobson's 1976 statehood bill, Guinan drafted a four-step statehood initiative and independently filed the measure with the Board of Elections. Incensed that they were not consulted, the DCSP's central committee was surprised to learn that Guinan was in fact a party member. In a tense meeting, the anti-poverty activist urged them to back the initiative, contending not to do so would risk their irrelevance. While concerned that the organizing architecture was not in place, and that a failed vote would be a devastating setback, party members also felt they had little choice in the matter. Within a few weeks Aronica, Butler, and Guinan were on the radio together discussing the initiative; the party officially endorsed the proposal and pledged its support for the petition drive soon after.[75]

Aronica, who had drafted the two previous statehood bills, promptly joined Guinan's Statehood Initiative Committee, acting as liaison between the party and the campaign. Bruning and Hanrahan also embraced the effort, helping to recruit the nearly 13,00 signatures needed to place the referendum on the ballot. The party's more visible members initially maintained more distance, with Mason concerned about how the council would perceive the initiative and Butler frustrated that the process was beyond the DCSP's direction. The different camps quickly moved closer together, however, when it became clear that they needed each other. As the petition drive gained steam it began to look like the referendum might be successful, an opportunity Butler and Mason would be sore to miss. At the same time, the overwhelmingly white signature-gathering team assembled by Guinan risked being painted as elitist and out of touch with the city's pulse. In early 1980, an expanded Statehood Initiative Committee submitted nearly 22,000 signatures.[76]

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[75] "Central Committee Meeting Minutes," July 19, 1979, Box 1, D.C. Statehood Party Records; "Central Committee Meeting Minutes," August 7, 1979, Box 1, D.C. Statehood Party Records; "Central Committee Meeting Minutes," August 21, 1979, Box 1, D.C. Statehood Party Records; Philip G. Schrag, *Behind the Scenes: The Politics of a Constitutional Convention* (Washington: Georgetown, 1985), 20-22.

[76] Edward Guinan, interview, December 15, 1998, Box 1, D.C. Statehood Movement Leaders Oral History Project, The People's Archive, DC Public Library; Hanrahan, interview; Schrag, *Behind the Scenes*, 22-25.

With more than enough signatures to clear any challenges to the petition, the committee still faced obstacles at the Board of Elections, which ruled that the initiative was unconstitutional due to the city's status as a federal district. A judge overturned this decision, but the delay meant that the referendum would need to appear on the November ballot rather than the more popular September primary. The initiative also faced vocal opposition from the *Star* and the League of Women Voters, whose base was concentrated in the largely white and conservative ward three. Concerned that a statehood drive would kill the already stumbling Voting Rights Amendment, Fauntroy also came out strongly against the initiative, sending a letter to his constituents urging a "no" vote. Between on-the-ground organizing and the wide appeal of self-government, however, the initiative was able to overcome these barriers. The referendum passed by a 3-2 margin.[77]

The referendum's success in turn led to new challenges from entrenched forces who stood to lose power with the transition to statehood. A congressman from Virginia introduced a resolution of disapproval, hoping to block the initiative from becoming law; the measure was neutralized by Dellums, the longtime champion for DC statehood who now also headed the House District Committee. Members of the council, too, worked to undercut the effort. Polly Shackleton successfully amended the law, limiting the constitutional convention to 90 days and restricting to a single attempt any redrafts should the voters reject the constitution as originally proposed. The $700,000 authorized for the convention and related statehood commissions by the ballot measure was shrunk to $150,000. Neither the antipathy of the council or an almost total blackout from news media could prevent the convention from going forward, however, and in November 1981 forty-five delegates were elected to draft a proposed state constitution the following spring. Most were new to electoral politics, with only a handful having served in a

[77] Schrag, *Behind the Scenes*, 23-25; Musgrove, "Statehood is Far More Difficult," 7-8.

citywide position. Of the delegates five were DCSP members: Richard Bruning, Charles Cassell, Michael Marcus, and Hilda and Charles Mason. Ironically, both Butler and Guinan lost their bids for at large seats.[78]

The three-month constitutional convention was marked by contention, with reignited rivalries, attempted power grabs, and exhaustive arguments over procedure beginning even before the opening gavel was rang on January 31. It was also a robust experiment in deliberative democracy, during which delegates from distinct social backgrounds and with at times sharply contrasting worldviews hashed out agreements over governmental powers and the fundamental rights that should be afforded citizens. Committees worked doggedly to draft their respective sections, often substantially revising them following debate on the convention floor, which could go on for hours. A style and drafting committee then stitched the different sections together, after which delegates were given additional opportunities to propose amendments. On the final roll call, thirty-six delegates voted to adopt the constitution while two delegates voted no and four abstained. Despite the strict timetable and limited funds for research or administrative staff—let alone printing and office supplies—convention president Cassell guided the assembly towards a successful conclusion, delivering a draft constitution on time and under budget in May.[79]

While the form of government mandated by the draft constitution was fairly traditional, its main distinction being a unicameral rather than bicameral legislature, the rights it sought to enshrine were significantly to the left of mainstream political debate at the time. The bill of rights for the state of New Columbia guaranteed employment or adequate income, protected reproductive freedoms and gay and lesbian rights, expanded civil liberties and the rights of

[78] Schrag, *Behind the Scenes*, 27-30; Guinan, interview.
[79] "Transcript: 05/29/1982 (2)," Washington, DC Statehood Constitutional Convention Records, Special Collections Research Center, Gelman Library, The George Washington University; Schrag, *Behind the Scenes*, 133-232.

criminal defendants, and upheld efforts to redress racial and gender discrimination such as affirmative action. Its preamble declared world peace a priority, while subsequent articles asserted the right of public workers to strike, provided for public ownership of utilities, and prescribed the right to a clean and healthful environment ensured through legal enforcement. The constitution, Cassell beamed, was "the most progressive official state document produced in the history of this nation," a guiding light in which the District's citizens should take pride.[80]

The five months between the convention and the November vote on ratification provided ample time to attack the constitution's social and economic provisions, which the Board of Trade and Republican Party did with vigor, calling for the measure's defeat. *The Washington Post* pushed a withdrawal and redraft plan before urging voters to reject ratification. Barry, Fauntroy, and most councilmembers demurred from public comment in the runup to the vote, reinforcing the perception that they wished the entire statehood initiative would simply wither way. Early white advocates of statehood such as Aronica and Smith, sympathetic as they may have been to the rights the constitution enshrined, would have preferred that the convention saved such matters for a future state legislature rather than place them before a largely hostile Congress. Ultimately, 53% of District voters—a figure that jumps to 60% when the overwhelmingly white ward three is excluded—chose to adopt the constitution for the state of New Columbia and its expansive vision of citizenship.[81]

The District submitted the adopted constitution to Congress for approval the following year, where it made little headway beyond several sparsely attended hearings. While statehood's

[80] Schrag, *Behind the Scenes*, 257-297; Charles Cassell, "Looking to Statehood," The Washington Post, June 6, 1982.
[81] Lou Aronica, interview, October 6, 1998, Box 1, D.C. Statehood Movement Leaders Oral History Project, The People's Archive, DC Public Library; Musgrove, "Statehood is Far More Difficult," 7-8; Schrag, *Behind the Scenes*, 245.

slim prospects stemmed more from its potential to upset the partisan balance of forces nationally, critics including Fauntroy honed in on the constitution as a chief stumbling block to its passage. He soon began urging moderation of the constitution's provisions while committing to make a good faith effort under more favorable political conditions. When they arrived with the election of the 100th Congress, council chairman David Clarke—one of the few elected officials to serve as a delegate during the constitutional convention—introduced a reworked constitution in 1987 modeled on the city's charter, which the council voted to adopt in place of the 1982 compact. Butler, who then chaired the city-funded Statehood Commission, denounced the council's blatantly undemocratic actions as a sign of their "arrogance." Nor were the council's moves successful, as the revised constitution never made it to the House floor.[82]

In what would become a recurring theme, taking issues directly to District voters through a ballot initiative revealed how the city's Black majority and its political class were not always in sync. Written off as a strategic failure or at best a detour, the constitution for the state of New Columbia and its ratification may better be perceived as a generative refusal of Reagan era realism, one animated by a more capacious sense of both what is possible and what is owed to one another. In this refusal, the charter reflects the party that laid the groundwork for its passage.

[82] Lawrence Feinberg, "Bill to Grant Statehood for the District Introduced in Senate by Kennedy," *The Washington Post*, May 16, 1984; Sandra Evans, "Statehood Charter Moderation Urged," *The Washington Post*, May 14, 1985; Douglas Stevenson, "D.C. Council Moves to Make Statehood More Palatable," *The Washington Post*, March 4, 1987; Eric Pianin, "D.C. Statehood Fauntroy's Big Loss," *The Washington Post*, November 12, 1987.

Chapter 3

"People Should Participate in Every Decision Affecting Their Lives": The Adams Morgan Organization and the Fight for Neighborhood Control over Redevelopment

> This is a very special community. There isn't another one like it in Washington. But if we want to keep it, we'll have to fight for it.
>
> This is a very special community. Young and old, black and white, Spanish-speaking, poor, professionals, renters and residents, all living together in a part of the city that still has some street life, some community spirit.
>
> This is a very special community. It still has some hope of resisting the neon, dollar sign, carbon monoxide, high rise, fur coat and limousine blight that has destroyed Georgetown and Capitol Hill and countless other neighborhoods in cities across the nation.
>
> The attack against this community, your community – Adams-Morgan – has already begun. Speculators are holding on to empty buildings, waiting for prices to go up. Cheaply built but expensive to buy townhouses are being constructed in hopes that prices all around will inflate out of sight. People who love this community are in constant and real danger of being forced out for people who don't care about anything but making a profit!

HOW CAN WE FIGHT BACK? How can we keep this community together?[1]

Standing on the sidewalk with a loudspeaker, Walter Pierce addressed the crowd of five dozen assembled on the 1700 block of Willard Street NW. "We're here today to make clear to the rest of the real estate vultures and land speculators…that…we will not sit back and watch our community be sold out from beneath us like Georgetown, Southwest, and Capitol Hill," the 27-year-old chairman of the Adams Morgan Organization (AMO) proclaimed to cheers. Adams Morgan, he declared with resolve, "will remain a place where all of us can live…Black, white, and Spanish speaking low and middle income families will not categorically be moved to make way for whites to assume our community." Arranged in partnership with the radical drug treatment program Regional Addiction Prevention (RAP) and the D.C. Chapter of the Black

[1] "Adams-Morgan: Our Special Community," Adams Morgan Organization Supplement, *The Columbian*, June 28, 1973, Box 1, Marie S. Nahikian Papers, Smithsonian Anacostia Community Museum.

Panther Party, each headquartered nearby, the November 1973 anti-displacement rally was equal parts press conference, protest, and party. It was also one of the first public gatherings to inveigh against a new phenomenon, a process which AMO would later cast as 'reverse blockbusting'.[2]

Derided by a Washington Post columnist only a year earlier as the "dismal backwash of the Adams-Morgan area," Willard Street and its aging rowhouses in fact appeared ripe for reinvestment to D.C. Pope. The Silver Spring-based realtor had quietly bought up significant portions of the block with plans to remodel the properties. Less than a mile from the increasingly fashionable Dupont Circle, Pope purchased the homes for between $7,000 and $15,000 each and hoped to sell them for $40,000 following their renovation. The only thing standing in his way were the Black families who lived there—including some for three or four decades. In October, Pope's team delivered an alleged twenty-two eviction notices within a single week.[3]

Founded in May 1972 to provide the neighborhood with a unified voice, AMO moved swiftly to the center of conflict over its future. Known for the durable if at times contentious coexistence it maintained between different ethnic groups, Adams Morgan underwent several in-migrations over the previous decade, with a multinational Latinx community and largely white counterculture joining the preexisting mix of working-class African Americans and wealthier white residents. By the early 1970s, such diversity—along with charming pre-war architecture and easy access to downtown—had become a key selling point, sending housing prices soaring. Yet the renovated townhomes and boutique shops in which some saw the promise of urban

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[2] Paul W. Valentine, "Inner-City Group Fights Investor," *The Washington Post*, November 6, 1973; Marie S. Nahikian, interview by Samir Meghelli, July 21, 2017, A Right to the City Exhibition Records, Smithsonian Anacostia Community Museum, https://sova.si.edu/details/ACMA.03-119?t=W&q=nahikian#ref3. On residential rehabilitation and displacement in Georgetown and Capitol Hill, see Chris Myers Asch and George Derek Musgrove, "We are Headed for Some Bad Trouble: Gentrification and Displacement in Washington, DC 1920-2014," in Hyra, Derek S, and Sabiyha Prince, eds. *Capital Dilemma: Growth and Inequality in Washington DC* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 107-135.

[3] Wolf Von Eckhart, "The New Resident on Willard Street," *The Washington Post*, November 6, 1972; Valentine, "Inner-City Group Fights Investor."

revitalization others perceived white encroachment and the specter of their displacement. Acting as a first line of defense, over the next decade AMO would engage in a variety of tactics—from guerilla street theater to alternative economics projects to community benefit agreements—in its efforts to slow down and reshape the terms of the neighborhood's redevelopment.[4]

The birth of AMO coincided with the rise of the neighborhood movement nationwide. A response to the foundering of national domestic policy, a rejection of centralized planning and modernist redevelopment, and an adaptation to the post-industrial transformation of cities, this new localism was as eclectic as it was widespread. Throughout the 1970s, groups as diverse as Alinsky-style agitators, Black nationalists, brownstone rehabbers, coastal environmentalists, new right libertarians, and white ethnic revivalists each laid claims to the local banner. Shared across their conflicting impulses and ideologies were an emphasis on authenticity, 'human-scale' structures for participation, a distrust of government and corporate intervention, and an insistence on the right of communities to determine their own futures. As Suleiman Osman has argued, this understudied tendency challenges ongoing perceptions of the period as one of decaying cities and declining political activity. It also illuminates the transition from Great Society liberalism to the market-driven neoliberalism of the 1980s and the role of urban voluntarism within this shift. [5]

Addressing this lack of historical attention to the neighborhood movement, recent studies by Osman and others have analyzed its intellectual and institutional ties to the Institute for Policy Studies and gauged how it reflected an increasingly popular scale of politics that was "militantly local" and "neither exclusively Left nor Right" in its objectives. A closer look at the history of

[4] Thomas W. Lippman, "Adams-Morgan Housing Prices Soaring," *The Washington Post*, March 24, 1974; Thomas W. Lippman, "Adams-Morgan: Community Divided," *The Washington Post*, March 25, 1974.
[5] Suleiman Osman, "The Decade of the Neighborhood," in Bruce J. Schulman and Julian E. Zelizer, eds. *Rightward Bound: Making America Conservative in the 1970s* (Cambridge: Harvard, 2008), 106-127. On the centrality of the neighborhood as a site of US political and cultural imagination, see Benjamin Looker, *A Nation of Neighborhoods: Imagining Cities, Communities, and Democracy in Postwar America* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2015).

AMO—whose leaders not only took part in but helped to coalesce the neighborhood movement nationally—brings further complexity to this emergent scholarly picture. Mobilizing in response to displacement, the campaigns AMO undertook required them to work across multiple scales at once and expressed commitments to broadly transformative and distinctly left-aligned goals. In the process, they also shifted in strategic emphasis from securing neighborhood sovereignty to altering citywide policy, a realignment no doubt shaped by the arrival of home rule two years into the group's existence. While scholars have assessed how New Left desires for authenticity contributed to the emergence of gentrification, the case of AMO demonstrates how localists with movement roots also resisted its imposition well into the decade.[6]

This chapter charts the emergence and evolution of the Adams Morgan Organization and its efforts to enact neighborhood autonomy as a countervailing force to gentrification in the 1970-80s. With the motto "Unity in Diversity," AMO created a multiracial and multilingual assembly as a forum for democratic decision-making in the years prior to home rule, inspiring the Advisory Neighborhood Council (ANC) structure that was established with its ratification. Acting as a catalyst for alternative paths of development, AMO's project committees brought residents together around environmental beautification, youth recreation, cooperative economic enterprise, and sustainable food and technology experiments. By the mid-1970s, such projects were largely eclipsed by urgent campaigns to prevent the displacement of longtime residents, secure the passage of a citywide land speculation tax, and wrest community reinvestment from a local bank with a history of redlining. While AMO was remarkably successful in its organizing and policy achievements, long-term neighborhood outcomes nonetheless revealed the limited

[6] Benjamin Looker, "Visions of Autonomy: The New Left and the Neighborhood Government Movement of the 1970s," *Journal of Urban History* 38, no. 3 (2012): 578-581; Osman, "Decade of the Neighborhood," 115; Suleiman Osman, *The Invention of Brownstone Brooklyn: Gentrification and the Search for Authenticity in Postwar New York* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

ability of local groups to safeguard their communities from the predatory reach of real estate capital. It also struggled at times to live up to its diverse and democratic vision, particularly with regards to the participation of Latinx residents in its community assembly and campaigns. AMO declined organizationally in the late 1970s as its leadership pursued formal political office and its strategic direction shifted from protesting financial institutions to partnering with them. Lessons first learned in the streets of Adams Morgan, though, were put to use on a wider scale, informing the conversion of thousands of rental units to cooperative ownership in the city and the evolution of community development strategies nationally.

"A New Thrust Toward Community Unity": Failed Renewal Plans and the Path to AMO

Located just northwest of the L'Enfant Plan's boundaries, the area which would come to be known as Adams Morgan developed rapidly in the late 1800s with the arrival of the electric streetcar. By the 1920s it was a premier destination for much of Washington's upper classes, who lived within the neighborhood or the adjacent Kalorama Triangle and patronized businesses such as the Knickerbocker Theatre and French restaurant Avignon Freres. Down the hill and to the east of these newly built Beaux-Arts apartment buildings and townhomes were several small yet longstanding communities of African Americans, a number of whom labored as domestic workers or chauffeurs in the wealthy white households nearby. With the arrival of the New Deal and entry of the US into World War II—and the dramatic expansion of the federal government—civil servants flocked to the area, facilitating its further development. Many would depart almost as quickly following the 1954 *Brown v. Board* decision, sparking apprehension about the neighborhood's destabilization and inspiring a racially integrated citizens' campaign to improve both the schools and surrounding streets. These rehabilitation efforts, and their failure to gain

federal support due to both neighborhood conflict and congressional interference, set the stage for AMO and its self-governing assembly a decade later. [7]

Taking its name from the all-white Adams and all-Black Morgan elementary schools, the Adams Morgan Better Neighborhood Conference evolved from efforts to prevent racial violence amidst the school integration process. Realizing that their attention would need to extend beyond their schools' hallways and playgrounds for integration to succeed, Adams principal Florence Cornell and Morgan principal Bernice Brown convened a group of parents and civic leaders to address wider neighborhood problems in 1955. Cornell and Brown perceived the physical deterioration of the area and lack of recreational space as threats to retaining both white families drawn to the suburbs and middle-class Black families with increased housing options. Enlisting the support of American University, the Conference successfully lobbied the District government to fund a two-year demonstration project on the "elimination, control, and prevention of blight in an urban neighborhood which shows signs of deterioration but which is not designated for redevelopment" through "joint governmental and citizen action" in 1958.[8]

The project's first year focused primarily on organizing block clubs and conducting outreach to existing citizens groups. From this base-building process grew two new coalitions: the Adams Morgan Community Council and the Adams Morgan Planning Committee. (The process would also act to cement the area's new collective name: Adams Morgan.) While the Community Council concerned itself with a wide variety of issues and especially the schools, the Planning Committee focused its efforts on ways to physically improve the neighborhood through

[7] Jeffrey R. Henig, *Gentrification in Adams Morgan: Political and Commercial Consequences of Neighborhood Change* (Washington: George Washington University, 1982), 12-15.
[8]The District of Columbia Office of Urban Renewal in Cooperation with Stein and Marcou Associates and American University, *Adams-Morgan: Democratic Action to Save a Neighborhood*, January 1964, Box 1, J. George Frain Papers, Kiplinger Research Library, DC History Center.

conservation and rehabilitation. Releasing its recommendations at the end of the project's second year, the Planning Committee endorsed a set of priorities including improving commercial corridors, encouraging residential rehabilitation, and reducing traffic on residential streets. It also reached the conclusion that the neighborhood would need outside help to achieve these goals, proposing for a Community Council vote the issue of applying for federal urban renewal funds.[9]

With twenty-one member organizations endorsing the idea, an additional four approving the renewal designation for parts of the neighborhood, and none opposed, the Council forwarded its request to the NCPC in 1960. The following spring, the Planning Committee, NCPC, and RLA began working on a detailed proposal for the area, a process which comprised countless meetings and consumed an entire year. While a long road lay ahead, the Council was buoyed: its vision of citizen action was coming to life, and a new day was dawning for Adams Morgan.[10]

It was not to be. As details of the preliminary plan emerged in a series of open meetings, so too did latent conflict and self-interest. The white Kalorama Citizen's Association opposed the inclusion of its wealthier district within the renewal area's borders, contending any association with blight would deteriorate its property values. It also strenuously objected to the scattered site public housing which the plan proposed and its potential to expand the area's Black population. The Eighteenth and Columbia Road Business Association feared that small businesses would be shoved out; its chairman George Frain, a former Congressional aide, convinced several of his old employers to open a damning House investigation into urban renewal practices in the District. African American citizens groups who had tenuously supported renewal became alarmed by the

[9]Henry D. Kass, "Citizen Participation in a Technically-Oriented Government Decision-Making Process: A Study of the Development of a Neighborhood Plan for the Adams-Morgan Project Area, Washington, D.C." diss., (American University, 1969), 147-182.
[10] Wolf Von Eckhart, "The Adams-Morgan Story: Citizen Action Bogged Down," *The Washington Post*, November 16, 1964.

plan's proposal to relocate nearly 1,600 families despite its stated emphasis on rehabilitation. Others wondered if government control would only arrest the private restoration already taking place. Declaring it to be "not in the public interest," the NCPC killed the plan in 1965.[11]

Exhausted and embittered, the Planning Committee retreated from the scene. Yet even as it ebbed, its sister coalition revived the question of community control, this time over the issue of schools. Driven by decrepit conditions and desperate overcrowding at Morgan School, members of the Community Council developed a plan to take over its administration. Behind the drive were several families linked to the Institute for Policy Studies (IPS), a think tank known for nurturing ideas associated with the New Left. Committed to racial integration and interested in experimental forms of education, the IPS-affiliated Barbara Raskin and Irene Waskow hoped to transform Morgan into a national model, one which would exhibit new and non-alienating relationships between both teachers and students and the school and wider community. Their proposal would not have gotten very far, however, without the critical support of Bishop Marie Reed. A minister and longtime advocate for African Americans within Adams Morgan, Reed embraced the project as her own, expanding its legitimacy and encouraging local participation.[12]

The Community Council's proposal to take over Morgan School received surprisingly swift support from DC Schools Superintendent Carl Hansen and the Board of Education, and was approved in the spring of 1967 for the following fall. To manage the school day to day, the Community Council brought in a team from Antioch College, a radical bastion of liberal arts education based in Yellow Springs, Ohio. The controversial plan brought together experienced

[11] Jim Hoagland and Richard Severo, "Ills That Begot Renewal Plan Still Beset Adams-Morgan," *The Washington Post*, October 10, 1967.
[12] Morgan School panel discussion, March 21, 2014, Lessons of the Sixties Oral History Project, Special Collections Research Center, George Washington University; Jenny Moore, "Bishop Reed's a Fortress in Field of Social Justice," *The Washington Post*, September 17, 1967.

Morgan teachers, student teachers from the college, and classroom aids from the neighborhood. Prioritizing student discovery and self-initiative, its curriculum dispensed with both traditional hierarchies and predetermined learning standards. To oversee the school an elected Morgan Community School Board was created. The 1967 vote—the first local election in Washington since the Reconstruction era—led to Reed's election as chair. She and the rest of the new board wasted little time, jumping into school affairs while also working up plans for a new Morgan campus together with socially committed architects Tunney Lee and Colin "Topper" Carew.[13]

Over these same years, a new community was taking shape in the streets surrounding Columbia Road. Spanish-speaking immigrants, many of whom had worked as domestic staff in the nearby Latin American embassies, had begun to place down roots in the area. Drawn from multiple countries—including Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Panama, and Peru—along with Puerto Rico, this pan-ethnic collective first coalesced around access to resources such as restaurants and fresh produce, Spanish-language films and live music, and Shrine of the Sacred Heart Catholic Church. They were soon joined by subsequent waves of newcomers fleeing entrenched poverty and political upheaval in their home countries and in search of steady employment. By the mid-1960s, the Spanish-speaking population in Adams Morgan, Columbia Heights, and Mount Pleasant had grown to nearly 50,000.[14]

Despite comprising over 5% of the city's residents, the Latinx community remained largely invisible to the city bureaucracy. Due to language barriers, census undercounting, and the

[13] Susan Filson, "Antioch, District Plan Experimental Schools," *The Washington Post*, May 18, 1967; Paul W. Valentine, "Adams-Morgan Area to Pick School Council," *The Washington Post*, September 13, 1967; "School Eyed for All Morgan Residents," *The Washington Post*, December 7, 1967; Tunney Lee, interview by Samir Meghelli, April 17, 2017, A Right to the City Exhibition Records, Smithsonian Anacostia Community Museum, https://sova.si.edu/details/ACMA.03-119?t=W&q=tunney#ref6.

[14] Claude Koprowski, "Spanish-Speaking Community Protests Poverty Fund Cuts," *The Washington Post*, December 12, 1966; Olivia Cadaval, "The Latino Community," in Francine Curro Cary, ed. *Urban Odyssey: A Multicultural History of Washington, D.C.* (Washington: Smithsonian, 1996), 233-239.

fact that many were not U.S. citizens, Latinos also had limited access to social services such as housing, healthcare, and education. In protest of continued exclusion, leaders such as Committee of Spanish-speaking Organizations in Washington chairman Carlos Rosario staged office sit-ins and conducted letter writing campaigns, forcing the attention of Mayor Washington and the appointed Council. In 1970, the mayor responded by establishing a fifteen-member Spanish Community Advisory Committee to recommend programs and policies that would better address the community's needs. Given its limited powers and budget appropriation, however, organizers knew more than an advisory panel was necessary to demonstrate their collective strength and ensure substantive change. Their answer was to create a festival—one that would combine cultural celebration and culinary exhibition with community mobilization. Held annually from 1971 onward, the two-day Latino Festival grew to tens of thousands of attendees, at once a spirited occasion and a powerful showing of force. Helping to cement collective Latinx identity in the city, the Festival's location in Kalorama Park also consolidated the community's association with Adams Morgan and the area's reputation as a cosmopolitan gathering place.[15]

Growing out of these diffuse efforts, three community leaders—one African American, one white, one Latino—were invited to address a Catholic University law class on Adams Morgan in the summer of 1971. Trained at Howard as an architect, the 27-year-old Topper Carew spent most of his time directing The New Thing, an arts education center on 18th St. that engaged area youth through a variety of arts forms. Part of the broader Black Arts Movement, The New Thing also hosted jazz concerts, plays, and seminars, all with an eye towards building Black consciousness. When not teaching a class, hosting an event, or working on a project such

[15] "Spanish Panel Named," *The Washington Post*, July 31, 1970; Betty Medsger, "Latins Form Largest Immigrant Group," *The Washington Post*, December 4, 1972; Olivia Cadaval*, Creating a Latino Identity in the Nation's Capital: The Latino Festival* (London: Routledge, 1998).

as the Morgan School proposal, Carew produced films, including several *cinéma-vérité* style shorts exploring everyday life amidst the city's most marginalized residents. In his mid-30s, Steven Klein was an elected member of the Adams-Morgan Community Council board and had been active with the Planning Committee and Pilot District Project. A USAID officer with an expertise in energy policy, Klein conveyed a liberal faith in democratic action distinctive of the Kennedy era in which he came up. The elder statesman at almost fifty, Carlos Rosario was now working with the mayor's office as the full-time executive secretary of the Spanish Community Advisory Committee. Previously a community health worker, Rosario's approach blended civil rights tactics with a more traditional emphasis on ethnic uplift. Together the three formed an odd triptych. They left the discussion, however, convinced of the need to work with one another for the good of the neighborhood.[16]

That fall the three initiated a series of Saturday morning conversations at The Potter's House, a coffeehouse on Columbia Road operated by The Church of the Saviour. Held over breakfast, the weekly meetings offered a forum for residents to raise their concerns about the neighborhood and explore possibilities for a coordinated response. With a rotating group of participants whose numbers fluctuated from a dozen to almost fifty, the issues raised ranged from the mundane (too much trash on the street) to the existential (the nature of belonging). Frank discussions exposed the differences in people's experiences depending on their race and class positions, with Black residents decrying police violence and poverty, white residents voicing their anxieties about physical decline, and Latinx residents outlining how they are too often treated as an afterthought. At the same time, the talks pointed towards potential areas of

[16] Marie Nahikian, "AMO – Past, Present, and Future," Adams Morgan Organization Supplement, *The Columbian*, June 28, 1973, Box 1, Marie S. Nahikian Papers; Paul W. Valentine, "'New Thing' Plans Culture for the Poor," *The Washington Post*, July 07, 1967; "Topper Carew's New Thing," *The Washington Post*, July 10, 1969; "Spanish Panel Named"; Marie Nahikian in discussion with the author, August 08, 2022.

common cause: safe and dignified housing, clean parks and streets, access to healthcare. Often stretching into the afternoons, the conversations also displayed an excitement for creating something new. Agreeing that the Adams Morgan Community Council was too embedded in the white Kalorama quarter and too preoccupied with the schools to represent the neighborhood, the discussions soon turned towards forming a new structure for collective decision-making.[17]

New leadership emerged as the conversations progressed. Chief among these voices was Marie Nahikian, a white journalist and organizer who moved to the city after college in 1969. While a student at UNC-Greensboro, Nahikian worked alongside the Black women's student group to organize a student body wide boycott in support of cafeteria workers and their fight for fair wages. She also immersed herself in the New Left as a reporter for the student newspaper, covering Berkley protests and the 1968 Democratic National Convention in Chicago. These experiences led her to Washington and a stint with the U.S. Student Press Association before taking up a position as an editorial and research assistant for IPS co-director Richard Barnet. Like many others of her generation, Nahikian was drawn to Adams Morgan by its large group houses with cheap rents, convenient location, and reputation as a hive for radical subcultures.[18]

Leaders active in Adams Morgan for years rallied around the idea as well. While just 25, Walter Pierce started organizing when he moved to the neighborhood as a teenager and noticed there was little for him and the other youth to do. They soon formed the Ontario Lakers, a youth sports club whose name combined the street they were based on and that year's NBA champions. With little recreational space, the Lakers created their own, taking over a vacant four-acre tract adjacent to Rock Creek Park. In the ensuing years the Lakers and their supporters transformed

[17] Nahikian, interview by Meghelli, July 21, 2017; "News Notes," *The Potter's House City Center Newsletter*, March 5, 1972, Box 5, Columbian Newspaper Research Files Collection, The People's Archive, DC Public Library.
[18] Juanita Weaver, "It's Always the Women: An Interview with Community Organizer Marie Nahikian," Quest: A Feminist Quarterly 4, no. 4 (1978): 42-43; Nahikian, interview by Meghelli, July 21, 2017.

the site into a community-run park complete with ballfields, a playground, and produce garden. Upon returning to the area after four years in the Navy, Pierce took on a more formal role with the Lakers, helping to secure funds from the Neighborhood Planning Council for its programs.[19]

Members of the Morgan Community School Board Ed Jackson and Jo Butler also joined the Saturday conversations and the planning towards a new neighborhood organization. A youth counselor in his 40s, Jackson was a mentor at Morgan, which his children attended, as well as the church-affiliated program For Love of Children. Butler served as School Board chair following Reed's unexpected passing in 1969, helping it to weather storms over staffing and instruction before refocusing her energies on the DCSP. These respected figures and others—including Charlotte Filmore, who ran an early childhood center on Ontario Place; Fannie Hill, who fed hundreds and taught cooking demonstration and nutrition classes; and Eudora Webster, long active in local Democratic politics—bolstered the project in its early stages by bringing their ideas and encouraging others in Adams Morgan's Black community to do so as well.[20]

While the number of co-signers grew over the course of the Saturday meetings that fall and winter, questions of structure continued to loom large. What would allow this new effort to avoid the false start of the urban renewal years and their over-reliance on outside authorities? How could they evade the pitfalls of the umbrella organization, at once unwieldy and exploitable by its more powerful members? What forms would best promote equal participation across the neighborhood's districts given their significant socioeconomic differences? In a city that lacked

[19] "Re-Elect Walter C. Pierce Chairperson Adams Morgan Organization Flyer," 1974, Box 1, Walter Pierce Ontario Lakers Collection, Smithsonian Anacostia Community Museum; Amanda Huron with Nancy Shia, "Caring in Public: The Struggle for Community Park West," *Washington History* 33, no. 1 (2021), 28-29; Robert F Levey, "Old Time Ward Fight Marks Election," *The Washington Post*, November 07, 1970.
[20] Edward G. Jackson, interview, May 11, 1990, Box 4, Adams Morgan/Lanier Heights Historic Resources Survey Records, Kiplinger Research Library, DC History Center; "11 Quit Morgan School," *The Washington Post*, June 08, 1970; Kitty Chism, "City Plans to Honor Child-Care Center Owner, 82," *The Washington Post*, May 18, 1983; Nahikian, interview by Meghelli, July 21, 2017.

representative democracy, how might the residents of Adams Morgan take it one step further, not only electing their own leaders but creating avenues for participatory decision-making?

In seeking to answer these questions the group turned to IPS, where Nahikian worked and Carew had earlier been an associate fellow. An action-oriented think tank that combined policy analysis with experimental projects, IPS's staff and fellows were eager to test out their ideas, many of which explored ways to decentralize power and deepen collective life. Nahikian and the others found an intellectual co-conspirator in Milton Kotler. One of IPS's first resident fellows, Kotler had published *Neighborhood Government: The Local Foundations of Political Life* several years earlier. The short and sharply written study prescribed neighborhood sovereignty as the solution to the self-aggrandizing forces of the central city and the discontent and apathy they fostered. Underlying the work were several key claims. 1) The town meeting—in which people deliberate and decide on the issues that directly affect them—is the true seat of democracy. 2) Territorial claims form the basis for political power and offer the best lever for pursuing social change. 3) That neighborhoods across the country are demanding control over their own affairs shows that an unheralded revolution is underway—one with the promise to revitalize self-rule.[21]

Kotler's case for placing the greater share of governance back in the hands of local communities cut across traditional political divisions between the left and right; appealing to New Left demands for autonomy and empowerment even as it upheld Jeffersonian ideals lauded by many conservatives. It also drew on his experience in Columbus, Ohio, where Kotler worked with Lutheran minister Leopald Bernhard and SNCC veteran Ivanhoe Donaldson to establish the

[21] Marie Nahikian, interview by Onka Dekker, May 11, 2016, Lessons of the Sixties Project, Special Collections Research Center, The George Washington University; Benjamin Looker, "Visions of Autonomy: The New Left and the Neighborhood Government Movement of the 1970s," *Journal of Urban History* 38, no. 3 (2012), 578-581; Milton Kotler, *Neighborhood Government: The Local Foundations of Political Life* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1969).

East Central Citizen's Organization (ECCO). Funded initially by an OEO grant, the programs it offered were chosen by local residents at deliberative assemblies and overseen by an elected executive council. The Columbus project garnered wide praise, inspiring similar organizations in other cities and establishing Kotler as a premier interpreter of the rising neighborhood revolt.[22]

It is not difficult to see why the concept of neighborhood government resonated with the Saturday morning group. District residents were forced to supplicate Congress to fund projects such as parks and schools and were subject to its frequent whims. Citizens had no forum to elect local leaders beyond the arena of schools and the powerlessness of the appointed City Council was widely apparent. By forming their own assembly, Adams Morgan residents could reclaim the initiative from these unaccountable forces and begin to enact the changes they wanted themselves. In combining the deliberative town hall meeting with an elected council tasked with carrying out decisions, the ECCO model responded to both the need for political representation long felt by District residents and the desire for direct expressions of democracy sought by many young activists. Further, the call for self-government was one which could accommodate a wide array of ideological persuasions—of which the neighborhood had many—providing a basis for unity. Throughout the winter of 1972, the group honed their proposed structure and prepared to present it to the wider community. They also chose a name: the Adams Morgan Organization.

"The Power in AMO lies with the PEOPLE": Constructing the Community Assembly

For AMO to be successful it was not enough to seek the endorsement of area residents and existing groups, as new projects often do in their attempts to establish legitimacy. Rather, it would have to be taken up by the people of the neighborhood as their own, a process that took time and posed risks. Forging the democratic structures that would guide the organization and

[22] Looker, "Visions of Autonomy," 579-580; "Support East Central Citizens Organization Pamphlet," undated, Box 6, Judy Richardson Papers, Rubenstein Library, Duke University.

ground its authority within the wider community consumed a year from their initial proposal to final passage, with the election of the inaugural executive council requiring an additional three months. The path towards forming a collective voice for Adams Morgan was marked by conflict, as debates over election rules and assembly procedures evidenced deeper questions of power and control, and lagging outreach to Latinx residents limited AMO's claim to be fully representative of the neighborhood. Early confrontation and the compromise required to move forward, though, enabled AMO to steadily extend its base and strengthen its collective resolve—each of which were necessary for the fights ahead.

The first formal invitations to discuss the founding of AMO were issued in April. At these smaller gatherings, core members of the Saturday sessions went over the neighborhood government's proposed structure. At its base is the community assembly, which meets twice a year. Anyone who lives or works within the prescribed boundaries of the neighborhood is eligible to become a member. At these assembly meetings, members determine which projects to adopt for the coming year and authorize committees to carry out their work. To oversee the project committees, administratively maintain the organization, and ensure the assembly's overall objectives are moving forward, members annually elect an executive council. Candidates for the council are drawn from each of Adams Morgan's five districts, with members choosing representatives from their home district only. The chairperson of the council is elected by the whole assembly shortly thereafter. While it would meet more frequently, Nahikian and Carew were careful to stress that the executive council would be subject to the will of the community assembly, which comprises the organization's ultimate and legally binding authority. The power, therefore, would be formally vested in the members: neighborhood residents and workers.[23]

[23] "AMO Invitation to a Community Meeting," 1972, Box 1, Marie S. Nahikian Papers; Nahikian, "AMO – Past, Present, and Future"; "The Adams Morgan Organization Pamphlet," 1977, Box 1, Marie S. Nahikian Papers.

While presenting the concept to smaller groups, AMO's initiators also began planning towards a mass meeting, posting flyers throughout the area and passing out handbills. The core team's extensive organizing and contagious excitement bore fruit: on May 6, 1972, a crowd of approximately 250 filed into Adams School to discuss forming a neighborhood government. Carew, Klein, and Rosario opened the meeting, providing an overview of the concept in both English and Spanish and answering questions. D. C. Superior Court Judge Harry Alexander, an African American justice known for his advocacy of civil rights, then presented the articles of incorporation. In a preview of what lay ahead, the typically routine procedure of ratifying the articles quickly became bogged down. The listing of individual incorporators, a requirement by law, led to alarm; small amendments to the language of the articles were debated back and forth for several hours. Eventually, though, agreement was reached and the articles of incorporation were passed by floor vote. For AMO founders such as Klein, the nearly four-hour gathering was a vital confirmation of their work over the previous six months: "The fact that so many people came out and saw the meeting to a successful conclusion proves that we have a lot of concerned people who are affirming the concept of AMO." Nahikian echoed these sentiments, describing the meeting years later as the moment AMO went from an idea to a widely embraced reality.[24]

The gathering's successes were not unqualified. Observers noted the divergence between the diverse co-founders present on the stage and the rest of the attendees, which were primarily white. Many were older residents who had been active with the Community Council years before; most of the younger residents formed part of the wave of newcomers to Adams Morgan. A small contingent of African Americans were there, including some affiliated with RAP. Few Latinx residents attended beyond those already involved in the Saturday discussions. Seeking to

[24] "AMO: We've Only Just Begun," *The Potter's House City Center Newsletter*, May 11, 1972, Box 5, Columbian Newspaper Research Files Collection; Nahikian, interview by Meghelli, July 21, 2017.

address this imbalance before it grew any further, the meeting planning committee conducted targeted outreach and increased their publicity efforts in the neighborhood's eastern half. They also moved the second mass meeting to Morgan School in the hope that it would encourage greater participation of Black and Latinx residents.[25]

Dedicated to a discussion of the bylaws, the June meeting was attended by approximately 125, half the number of the previous gathering yet still a considerable showing given the subject matter. Hoping to turn their full attention towards tackling neighborhood problems, the planning committee aimed to secure passage of the bylaws at this or the following mass meeting. Ensuing debate, however, showed this to be an unrealistic objective. While significant work on the legal and organizational structure had been done in advance, numerous sticking points remained. What constituted a quorum, enabling those present to make binding decisions for the whole assembly? How would conflict be resolved in instances where a sense of group consensus was unreachable? Who would hold fiduciary responsibility for the organization and the projects it sponsored? How would paid staff relate to the rest of the structure, and what would be there specific rights and responsibilities? Most pointedly, how would equitable representation of different racial/ethnic groups and districts be ensured given the ways that structural factors, including available free time, disparately shaped participation? Resolving these matters required debate at every turn and often raised new questions in the process. Realizing that more time and work were needed to democratically reach agreement, the meeting adjourned with ¼ of the bylaws approved.[26]

While deepening collective ownership over the organization, the considerable time it was taking to cement the details of AMO's governance structure also posed a problem. The list of

[25] "AMO: We've Only Just Begun"; "AMO: Getting Itself Together," *The Potter's House City Center Newsletter*, June 11, 1972, Box 5, Columbian Newspaper Research Files Collection.
[26] "AMO: Getting Itself Together"; Nahikian, interview with author, August 08, 2022.

groups which fizzled out in the planning stage, mired in arguments about rules and procedure, was too long to count. AMO was determined to avoid this fate and wisely made the decision to move forward on other fronts while it refined the bylaws. To maintain momentum and make its presence wider known, the group organized a neighborhood-wide cleanup in July. 200 people came out to sweep the streets and clear debris; afterwards they gathered for food and music at Community Park West. This emphasis on action was continued at the mass meeting in October, which focused on projects under formation related to recreation, environmental beautification, and housing and planning. (The meeting also featured a short speech from DCSP candidate for delegate Charles Cassell, whose call for statehood received resounding applause from members.) AMO also began to build out its administrative architecture. With its incorporation in place, the organization opened a bank account and started fundraising, securing several small grants from local churches and private foundations. It also, significantly, took on its first staff member. Let go from IPS after throwing herself headlong into the work of creating AMO—and recoiling as her research assistant duties increasingly resembled those of a personal secretary—Nahikian was hired on an interim basis at the sparse rate of $75 per week to develop the organization's internal structures and support the growth of its membership.[27]

Differences over how to institute equal representation and equitable participation within AMO came to a head at a January 1973 general assembly focused on finalizing the bylaws. At issue was the question of election procedures, including both how district representatives would be elected to the executive council and how at-large council members would be chosen. The elections subcommittee prepared two proposals for consideration: conducting elections within

[27] "AMO Plans a Community Clean Up and Picnic," *The Potter's House City Center Newsletter*, July 23, 1972, Box 5, Columbian Newspaper Research Files Collection; Karl Hess, *Community Technology* (New York: Harper, 1979), 40-41; "AMO Meeting Discusses Problems," *The Columbian*, October 15, 1972, Washingtoniana Periodicals Collection, The People's Archive, DC Public Library; Marie Nahikian, interview by Onka Dekker, May 11, 2016.

each of the five districts at designated polling sites or holding elections directly at the community assembly, with each district caucusing to choose their representatives followed by a general body vote for at-large members. Arguing in favor of neighborhood elections, Walter Pierce and Albert Witcher questioned how a meeting of 100 or so electors could reasonably claim to represent a neighborhood of 30,000. They also raised their concern that selecting at-large council members at the assembly would tilt the scales towards the white and wealthy districts west of Columbia Road given their greater participation to date, with Pierce declaring "I don't think it's fair for the people from the nice homes to run the whole organization." Advancing assembly-held elections, Steven Klein countered that "We are not trying to shut any neighborhood out of participation in AMO. Our only concern is finding the best means towards reaching the people." Electing council representatives at meeting of the general assembly, he reasoned, would help ensure those elected were active participants in the organization and promote a sense of unity and shared purpose.[28]

The debate over how to hold elections that followed quickly devolved. Advocates for neighborhood-based elections charged that AMO insiders were attempting to railroad through their agenda and asserted that the reason many Black residents chose not to attend meetings was because they already perceived the group as white-dominated. Defending themselves, AMO committee members responded that their outreach attempts were often met with disinterest and that some of their critics contributed little beyond fomenting division. The perception that AMO only argued and talked in circles, they maintained, only furthered the problem of getting people out to meetings. After it became clear that the proposal for neighborhood-based elections had carried the day, discussion turned towards the question of at-large representatives, eliciting a further round of discord. As the debate reached a fever pitch, Ron Pierce (brother of Walter)

[28] Don Lehman, "Discord Halts AMO Assembly," *The Columbian*, February 1, 1973, Box 1, Walter Pierce Ontario Lakers Collection, Smithsonian Anacostia Community Museum.

raised a point order, calling for a headcount to determine if there was the necessary quorum of 100 to even make binding decisions. With only 93 members present by that hour, the meeting was adjourned and resolution of the election rules pushed off to a future date. Demoralized, Nahikian remarked to local community newspaper *The Columbian*: "I've been working for a year with a lot of other people doing the actual shit work in just organizing a meeting like this. I can't tell you what it does to me to see the meeting totally degenerate over little, picky points when the neighborhood is disappearing under our feet." All the dissension, she contended, only drew their collective energies away from addressing urgent issues such as displacement.[29]

The meeting's rancor prompted some soul-searching and spurred attempts to reach a compromise. The following week *The Columbian* printed a symposium on the state of AMO, inviting leading voices from the assembly to share their thoughts on where things stood and how best to move forward. While one respondent questioned AMO's purpose and another pointed the finger at the paper and its reporting, most affirmed the path they were on and maintained that the conflict AMO was undergoing was ultimately a sign of how much people believed it was needed. More measured with some distance, Nahikian reflected: "it is healthy and points to the relevancy of AMO that any individual or group comes to a Community Assembly to express their ideas, problems and criticisms." Observing that "nothing good ever comes easy," Walter Pierce wrote "there is no need for the citizens of Adams Morgan to start fighting because the real fight doesn't start until we meet the government and we haven't even left the community yet." Klein noted the group's multiple successes in its short existence and urged final approval of the bylaws so AMO could get on about its work. In contrast to the previous meeting, on February 25 the assembly unanimously ratified reworked election rules that better addressed the concerns raised for

[29] Lehman, "Discord Halts AMO Assembly."

equitable representation. Under the rules passed, elections would be held in each of the five districts, with each district choosing five council representatives. Of these, one representative had to be under the age of 21. Five at-large seats would be chosen directly by the elected council with the goal of accurately reflecting the community and ensuring necessary expertise was present, bringing the total number of the council to thirty. With this enormous organizational hurdle cleared, AMO turned in the spring towards planning for the election.[30]

Recognizing that the legitimacy of its neighborhood government rested considerably on voter turnout, AMO members redoubled their efforts to increase the organization's visibility ahead of the election. It opened an office, operating temporarily out of the Transcentury building before securing a more prominent storefront space on 18th St. Volunteers in the office registered members, reviewed candidacy petitions, and contacted businesses and schools to serve as polling sites. They collected candidate profiles, which were printed in a supplement to *The Columbian* alongside an election map and an appeal for community participation. Members went door to door and canvased the summer fair at Community Park West, passing out flyers and bumper stickers with "Neighbor Power" scrawled on them. Multiple election parties and a Meet the Candidates night were held in the weeks leading up to the June 30 election, which had been pushed back from the originally scheduled date of June 9 in order to ensure adequate preparation for the big day.[31]

For those who had been working towards the formation of a neighborhood government for over a year, the stakes of the election were high. In a city lacking democratic representation,

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[30] Multiple authors, "Adams Morgan Organization: A Symposium," *The Columbian*, February 1, 1973; "AMO Passes Election Rules," *The Columbian*, March 1, 1973, Washingtoniana Periodicals Collection.
[31] "AMO Opens Office," *The Columbian*, May 17, 1973, Washingtoniana Periodicals Collection; "AMO Elections to be Delayed," *The Columbian*, June 7, 1973, Washingtoniana Periodicals Collection; "AMO Opens Storefront Office," *The Columbian*, June 28, 1973; "AMO Elections Saturday: Vote!," *The Columbian*, June 28, 1973; Editorial, "Your Vote can give AMO Clout," *The Columbian*, June 28, 1973.

its orchestrators argued, the consequences also extended beyond the neighborhood's boundaries: "If the people of Adams-Morgan can pull together to focus their diversity towards a common goal of being able to make decisions about the quality of their lives, then AMO could have ramifications for every neighborhood in the city. Then the concept of home-rule will be a reality without the U.S. Congress ever having to take a vote." Expressing a demand for self-governance many in DC held, 1,300 Adams Morgan residents turned out to cast their vote on June 30. Of the inaugural elected members, fifteen were Black, eight were white, and two "Spanish-speaking."[32]

Two candidates with significantly contrasting leadership styles put their names forward for chair: Ed Jackson and Walter Pierce. A somewhat soft-spoken church deacon, Jackson led with service and perceived the "role as mostly carrying out the wishes of others." He envisioned AMO maintaining "a healthy exchange and dialogue" with the city government and other civic groups, working together to improve municipal services and social welfare programs in the neighborhood. Young and self-assertive, Pierce saw the chair's job as "to get as much done for as many people the way they want it." Both the city and local business leaders, he argued, did little for the community without being pushed and if AMO wanted to achieve its goals it would have to fight. At the August 5 assembly, Pierce's activist approach prevailed. For the year ahead, he named as key objectives the completion of a community survey, the creation of a job resource center, and a concerted push to confront the rising threat of land speculation.[33]

At its meeting the following week the executive council elected the remainder of its members, including three additional Latinx representatives. The appointment of three Latinx

[32] "AMO – Past, Present, and Future"; Adams Morgan Organization, "Organizational and Funding Update," September 1973, Box 1, Marie S. Nahikian Papers.
[33] "AMO Chairman Candidates Discuss Viewpoints," *The Columbian*, July 19, 1973, Washingtoniana Periodicals Collection; "Pierce elected chairperson of AMO," *The Columbian*, September 6, 1973, Washingtoniana Periodicals Collection.

residents alongside the two elected Latinx councilmembers signaled both AMO's desire to build a multi-lingual structure emblematic of the neighborhood's diversity and its somewhat limited traction in doing so. It also pointed to the ways that uneven access to spare time shaped patterns of participation within the assembly and rendered equitable representation an ongoing challenge. The council approved Nahikian's transition to interim executive director the same day, with a permanent position contingent on raising funds. Already AMO's leading organizer, Nahikian took on an increasingly public role as the fight against rent hikes and evictions grew that fall, testifying before the city council and appearing in *Post* articles on protests.[34]

As the most consistent presence in the office, Nahikian also took on a more central role in daily decision-making for the organization. Alarmed that the role of paid staff was starting to outweigh that of the elected executive council, Pierce wrote an open letter in January 1974 threatening to resign unless changes were made, including ensuring his signature was on any letters sent by the organization and that Nahikian publicly represented the organization only within her personal capacity as an individual AMO member. In the letter Pierce further objected to the council's appointment of Karl Hess, a white libertarian writer and activist affiliated with IPS, to an open seat from a predominantly Black district, casting it as a power move on behalf of white council members. The letter prompted an emergency meeting of the executive council, at which it was affirmed that "positions taken on behalf of AMO are made by the executive council" and that correspondence related to these decisions would be signed by the chairperson. Other letters could be signed by the executive director on the condition that copies are made available for review. Before the council was prepared to respond to Pierce's challenge of the appointment Hess had already resigned. While such conflicts were both bound to arise given

[34] Adams Morgan Organization, "Organizational and Funding Update"; "Pierce elected chairperson of AMO";

AMO's unique structure, they also pointed to issues of distrust and contests for power and control that lingered alongside proclamations of unity.[35]

Held at Morgan School, the March community assembly comprised one of AMO's most well attended and racially diverse meetings. The near capacity gathering, which opened with music from United Farm Workers in town for events related to the Safeway boycott, had as its central highlight the selection of an official Adams Morgan flag. Once sewn, the flag was to fly at the prominent corner of 18th and Columbia, expressing both the neighborhood's identity and its dedication to self-government. The winning design from Amiel Summers, chosen out of 168 submissions, depicted five interlocking links of chain in different representative colors above the words "unity in diversity." Both an aspiration and a key organizing principle, AMO's adopted motto also spoke to growing concerns around the "Georgetownization" of Adams Morgan, a trend which residents feared would lead to racial and economic displacement and leave the neighborhood culturally sterile. In its search for alternatives, the organization looked to the practical work of its project committees.[36]

"Neighbor Power!": Project Committees and the Promise of Collective Action

Authorized by the community assembly, AMO's project committees provided an outlet for Adams Morgan residents to act on the decisions they collectively endorsed. As one AMO brochure put it, its project committees were "people working together to get things done." To become a recognized project, ten members had to express their commitment to the proposal, which would then be put to a vote at the next assembly. If adopted, projects were expected to

[35] "Walter Pierce, "An Open Letter to the Community at Large," *The Columbian*, January 31, 1974, Washingtoniana Periodicals Collection; "AMO Council Irons Out Problems," *The Columbian*, February 18, 1974, Washingtoniana Periodicals Collection.
[36] "AMO Assembly Approves Committees, Picks Flag," *The Columbian*, April 4, 1974, Washingtoniana Periodicals Collection; "Editorial: The Dangers of Diversity," *The Columbian*, February 18, 1974.

meet regularly at a set time, be open for community participation, and provide reports back to the whole. These committees spanned the spectrum from widely embraced working groups dealing with perennial neighborhood issues to special initiatives carried out chiefly by a small group of core members. While the former were racially and economically diverse in their leadership and participation, the latter more often reflected the political and cultural priorities of young white activists associated with the New Left. What united these different undertakings is that they each sought to tackle a problem faced by Adams Morgan through self-directed and collective action.[37]

The first AMO committee to form sought to confront an issue that plagued all US cities in the 1970s: trash. Vacant lots, abandoned properties, and alleys often served as unsanctioned dumping grounds, forming a haven for rats and creating health and safety hazards for residents and especially children. Chaired by Ed Jackson, the Environmental Committee harnessed people power as a response, convening multiple cleanups in 1972-73 that drew hundreds. Members swept trash off the streets and piled up large debris, assisting the city's beleaguered sanitation department. They planted flowers and trees and built picket fences, beautifying the surrounding blocks. Jackson conducted outreach to local businesses, encouraging them to each do their part on and around their own properties as well as contribute financially to the wider campaign.[38]

AMO also joined a June 1973 parade calling on the District and federal governments to do more to eliminate environmental hazards in the city. Constructed of discarded items, AMO's King and Queen of Trash rode atop a garbage truck emblazoned with a "Clean Up the Mess Washington" banner. The group's float won first place. After initially working closely with the city's Department of Environmental Services on educational workshops and cleanup ventures,

[37] Nahikian, "AMO – Past, Present, and Future."
[38] "AMO: A Sign of Action," *The Columbian*, October 19, 1973, Washingtoniana Periodicals Collection; "Environmental Committee Holds Businessmen's Workshop," *The Columbian*, July 19, 1973.

extensive delays to promised Street Scene improvements led the organization to take a more confrontational approach, threatening to sue the city agency. The sternly worded letter received a prompt response; underfunding, however, continue to hamper services. Further, while proud of their work, the beautification efforts also sparked anxieties among some that a loss of grit in the neighborhood would only further encourage the growing trend towards land speculation.[39]

Long-term land speculation also threatened one of the cherished neighborhood resources residents had built from the ground up: Community Park West. The tract tended by the Ontario Lakers and their supporters was owned by the Shapiro brothers, local developers who leased the land to the youth organization for a dollar per year while waiting for its value to rise. Yet while the Shapiros had their eye on the land's soaring exchange value, planning to eventually sell the plot to a housing builder, its use value had grown exponentially by the 1970s as well, forming an autonomously organized urban commons both traced and theorized by Amanda Huron. The community-managed park was used daily by a diversity of residents and regularly played host to basketball tournaments, softball leagues, festivals, dances, and more. Seeking to protect one of the few places for Adams Morgan to gather and play, Pierce and others began to propose that the city purchase the park, an idea which AMO officially embraced at the December 1973 assembly. Securing Community Park West's future soon became the Recreation Committee's top priority.[40]

AMO, the Lakers, and others began a letter writing campaign and gave testimony before the council, winning the support of Mayor Washington and a place in the city's budget. With Congressional control over the city's finances, though, the park's purchase was far from assured.

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[39] "Parade Slated Against Trash," *The Washington Post*, June 1, 1973; "Photo of AMO Float," *The Columbian*, June 7, 1973; "AMO Threatens to Sue Street Scene," *The Columbian*, September 6, 1973; Sylvia Lewis, "Adams Morgan: Spiffed Up and Speculated On," *Planning* (March/April 1976), 27.

[40] "AMO Experiences Progress and Rewards," *The Columbian*, December 6, 1973, Washingtoniana Periodicals Collection; Huron with Shia, "Caring in Public," 28-30; Amanda Huron, *Carving out the Commons: Tenant Organizing and Housing Cooperatives in Washington, D.C.* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2018):43-65.

The price per acre was high and any deal would need to overcome the intransigence of William Natcher, chair of the Appropriations Committee and its DC Subcommittee. In their efforts to whip up the necessary votes, Pierce and Nahikian lugged an unwieldly television and videotape machine throughout the House office buildings, playing a film on the park for subcommittee members and any other representatives who would listen. With the establishment of the elected city council in 1975 the park received a well-positioned advocate in Dave Clarke, the Ward 1 councilmember and a civil rights lawyer who had previously worked closely with AMO. The council voted unanimously in favor of acquiring the land three times; in the meantime, the Shapiros began to move forward on the sale of tract for townhomes. AMO members kept the pressure up, however, and the council began exploring creative ways to ensure Community Park West' perpetuity. In 1978, the city used eminent domain to block the sale to builders, purchasing the land with reprogrammed surplus funds. A victory fourteen years in the making, 150 residents gathered in the park to celebrate two weeks later.[41]

The short film on Community Park West used to advocate for its purchase was produced by the Washington Community Video Center, located on 18th St. across from the AMO office. Headed by Nick DeMartino and Grady Watts, veterans of Federal City College's experimental video department, the center sought to deploy emergent technologies such as coaxial cable and videotape to democratize both what could be seen on television and who created the content. The center produced multiple films in partnership with AMO, documenting the fight against trash and debris, tenants rallying to stop their eviction, and meetings of the community assembly. Prepared for a housing workshop, one short followed Nahikian on a walking tour of the neighborhood as she outlined how "property is primed for renovation, restoration, and exploitation" by developers

[41] "Shapiro Tract in FY '75 Budget," *The Columbian*, February 18, 1974; Blair Gately, "The 14-Year Battle for a Park in Adams Morgan," *The Washington Post*, March 23, 1978; Huron with Shia, "Caring in Public," 30-32.

and real estate agents. Growing out of its educational workshops, which trained area residents and youth how to record and edit video, the center also released several films in Spanish that highlighted resources for the Latinx community in Adams Morgan and Mount Pleasant. The center's aperture also extended beyond the neighborhood, with its women's caucus producing works on lesbian feminism, women's sexual health, and the struggles of domestic workers.[42]

In addition to partnering with AMO to document local issues, DeMartino and other center members led the formation of its Cable TV committee. Among the ideas the committee explored was the creation of an AMO-owned television station that could produce news, educational, and health programming for viewing at community centers in Adams Morgan and eventually area homes. While this more ambitious vision of community ownership over cable failed to develop, the committee's advocacy at the city council helped to shape the regulatory framework for the technology's wider introduction in the city, including expanded local requirements for public access. Its pursuit of media democracy extended to the airwaves as well, with AMO acting as party to a 1975 suit that challenged the combined ownership of the Washington Star and WJLA-TV by Texas businessmen Joe Albritton and demanded diverse and equitable programming.[43]

How technology could be harnessed in service to a decentralist vision of urban life was also a preoccupation of Karl Hess, a former Goldwater speechwriter whose turn towards radical libertarianism garnered the fascination and financial support of IPS. Alongside his wife Therese Machotka, Hess formed the Community Technology project in 1973 to explore how science and

[42] "Community Video Center," *The Daily Rag*, August 10, 1973, Washingtoniana Periodicals Collection, The People's Archive, DC Public Library; "Washington Community Video Center Collection," *DigDC*, DC Public Library, 2021, https://digdc.dclibrary.org/islandora/object/dcplislandora%3A314779; Washington Community Video Center, "Adams-Morgan Gentrification and Displacement Walking Tour," *DigDC*, DC Public Library, 2021, https://digdc.dclibrary.org/islandora/object/dcplislandora%3A314797.

[43] "Video Centers Plans April 29 Open House," *The Columbian*, April 19, 1973, Washingtoniana Periodicals Collection; "CATV for Adams Morgan?," *The Daily Rag*, August 10, 1973; "F.C.C. Extends a Deadline for Comment on Transfer, *The New York Times*, October 22, 1975.

engineering could aid Adams Morgan in becoming economically self-sufficient and ecologically sustainable. Among their experiments, Community Technology took over part of an unused industrial warehouse, filling it with self-constructed freshwater tanks for growing trout. Aiming to produce several tons of fish for sale at less than Safeway prices, power outages caused the tanks to fail and the fish to die *en masse*. Other demonstration projects included a composting backyard toilet and a solar cooker. More practically, Hess and Machotka worked with AMO members to create vegetable gardens in vacant lots and built a compost bed for communal use. While short-lived, these experiments and those of the related neighborhood group The Institute for Local Self-Reliance helped prepare the ground for future urban-ecological innovation.[44]

Sharing this 'Small is Beautiful' spirit, members of AMO's Cooperative Economics committee sought to aid the development of cooperative businesses in Adams Morgan through research and technical support. Committee members also launched Fields of Plenty, a food and drug coop that served the northern section of the neighborhood. With both hard-to-find natural foods and affordable staples, its grocery offerings attracted a diverse clientele and its affordable over-the-counter medications met an essential need. Advertising itself as an "anti-profit store," Fields of Plenty formed part of a scene of small businesses motivated by radical politics that operated collectively and sold goods at cost plus overhead. Beyond operating the store, Fields of Plenty members led AMO's charge to repeal DC's regressive 2% food tax, committing Clarke to introduce the bill in 1975 as one of his first acts on the elected council. Other expressions of countercultural commerce on and around 18th St. included Stone Soup, a fellow food coop and

[44] "Karl Hess: Radical Decentralization," *The Columbian*, April 18, 1974, Washingtoniana Periodicals Collection; Hess, *Community Technology*, 42-45; David Morris and Karl Hess, *Neighbor Power: The New Localism* (New York: Harper, 1975), 136-137; On how the failure of communities of color to warm to Hess' romanticized vision of economic self-reliance led him to restage racist culture of poverty claims, see David J. Morris, "Adams Morgan Revisited: Lessons from Community Technology," *Self-Reliance* 19 (May–June 1979): 3, 10-11; also Looker, "Visions of Autonomy," 589-590.

lunch counter, and Bread & Roses, which sold rock, jazz, and folk records at a deep discount. Ironically, these anti-profit businesses contributed to the area's increasingly hip reputation, unintentionally priming the pump for real estate agents and property speculators.[45]

AMO's anti-corporate and environmental impulses were perhaps most on display in the public and protracted fight its Urban Planning Committee led against the construction of a BP service station. The site in question—which like Community Park West was owned by the Shapiro brothers—sat in the heart of the neighborhood at 18th and Columbia. Once home to the Ambassador Theater, a rundown venue that underwent a brief revival during 1967's Summer of Love, the corner now comprised a parking lot and required rezoning for the new use. Opposition to the zoning adjustment was near unanimous, particularly as there were already several stations close by; graffiti scrawled on the adjacent brick wall read "BP STAY OUT! / ¡FUERA DE ESTE LUGAR!" Even fierce conflict over the bylaws could not impede the formation of a united front against the station, with a decision to fight it among the community assembly's first acts. AMO members filled the February 1973 hearing, with Jackson offering testimony and Clarke providing legal representation during the tense three-hour meeting. The following month, the board voted to deny the rezoning. Any sense of triumph was brief, however, as the Shapiros quickly moved to appeal the decision in court. Proceedings dragged on for a year and a half before AMO—aided by the tide of public opinion turning against gas companies amidst the ongoing oil crisis—was able to declare its victory permanent. With is appeals exhausted, the Shapiros sold the site.[46]

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[45] "AMO Experiences Progress and Rewards"; Bob Kimball, "Food-Drug Co-op to Open Soon," *The Columbian*, December 20, 1973, Washingtoniana Periodicals Collection; Mark Looney, "Growing Anti-Profit Biz Scene," *The Daily Rag*, December 21, 1973; "Clarke Proposes Repeal of Food Tax, *The Columbian*, January 31, 1975, Washingtoniana Periodicals Collection; LaBarbara Bowman, "Council Bill Asks 2% Sales Tax End," *The Washington Post*, January 29, 1975; On the rise of countercultural businesses in the 1970s, see Joshua Clark Davis, *From Head Shops to Whole Foods: The Rise and Fall of Activist Entrepreneurs* (New York: Columbia, 2017).
[46] Don Lehman, "Board Deliberates Station Request," *The Columbian*, March 1, 1973; "Community Wins: BP Denied," *The Columbian*, April 5, 1973, Washingtoniana Periodicals Collection; Ruth Stoltzfus, "Court Denies BP Station, 18th & Col. Corner Sold," *The Columbian*, August 23, 1974, Washingtoniana Periodicals Collection.

The struggle to prevent the Shapiros and BP from building a gas station taught AMO crucial lessons about the levers organized community members could exercise over land use. While enshrined and entrenched, the powers of private property holders were not absolute. Nor were their plans unalterable if enough neighbors turned out and took their case to court. These experiences were soon applied to AMO's largest project yet, one that ultimately overshadowed nearly all others: confronting the crisis of speculation driving up rents and displacing residents throughout the neighborhood and across the city. Unexpectedly, this battle for housing security and communal belonging would lead back to the very same corner of 18th and Columbia.

"Who's Going to Own Adams Morgan?" The Fight Against Speculation and Displacement

"What is happening now wasn't happening five years ago. But it is a process that has happened before—in Foggy Bottom, Georgetown, Southwest, and on Capitol Hill." With 18th St. as her backdrop, Nahikian narrated the changes taking place in the neighborhood, ones which would be familiar to many in the city: Black families who had rented homes for years suddenly facing eviction, turn-of-the century townhomes restored to their former glory and sold for two to three times their previous price, rent increases that only white professionals could accommodate. Situating Adams Morgan within the longer history of displacement in the District, she also noted the differences this time around, including how countercultural activists and artists crowded in communes helped to open up blocks to young white professionals and thus inadvertently served the interests of real estate investors. Further, many of these newcomers were in flight from the cultural homogeneity of the suburbs they grew up in and professed a commitment to racial and economic integration. "On Lanier Place," she noted, "all the available houses are being bought up, renovated, restored, and sold to young couples drawn to Adams Morgan by the very diversity that their overpowering presence will destroy." How to preserve and defend that diversity

became, over the course of several years, AMO's top priority. Across the 1970s, it deployed multiple strategies in its attempts to arrest displacement, ranging from confrontation and protest to advocacy and negotiation. In the process, AMO contributed to the evolution of equitable community development in the city and beyond.[47]

While AMO formed a Housing Committee soon after its founding and held exploratory workshops on housing problems in early 1973, the issue of residential displacement moved to the fore following the mass serving of eviction notices on Willard Street that November. The anti-gentrification rally AMO organized was covered by *The Washington Post*, forcing attention to a phenomenon that had received little coverage to date. Behind the scenes, the group worked with Willard Street residents to win stays of eviction, buying them some time. They also appointed a team to begin negotiations with Pope and his attorney, with the goal of applying community pressure to secure tenants a right to return at reasonable rents or ensure the properties that had already been vacated were sold to current Adams Morgan residents at an affordable price. Led chiefly by Nahikian and Klein, the team did not achieve their objectives, with Pope's lawyer balking at their stipulations. They did, however, convince Pope to walk away from the project altogether and left the experience battle-hardened and better prepared for future fights.[48]

Walter Pierce took a different approach to stemming white middle class encroachment, one that drew more on the repertoire of guerrilla street theater than carefully planned negotiation. Exploiting racist fears, he organized Black youth who were part of the Lakers to loiter around the trendy French restaurant that opened on 18th St., offering suburban patrons a stark reminder that

[47] Washington Community Video Center, "Adams-Morgan Gentrification and Displacement Walking Tour"; Marie Nahikian, "Blockbusters Manipulate Freaks," *The Daily Rag*, November 24, 1972.
[48] Don Lehman, "Willard St. Tenants Win Court Case," *The Columbian*, December 6, 1973; "AMO to Negotiate with Pope," *The Columbian*, December 20, 1973; "AMO Develops Homeowner Program in Area," *The Columbian*, March 18, 1974, Washingtoniana Periodicals Collection; "Willard St. Settlement Criticized by Pope's Attorney," *The Columbian*, April 18, 1974; Eileen Zeitz, *Private Urban Renewal* (Lexington: Lexington, 1979), 78.

the neighborhood was not their new playground. AMO's more militant contingent also picketed outside showings for rehabilitated townhomes and splattered paint on advertisements for luxury condominiums converted from once affordable housing. In a somewhat clandestine fashion, the Pierce brothers painted a message across a fifty-foot-wide brick wall at 18th and California Sts., easily visible as you entered the neighborhood heading north: "BEWARE WHITEY: BLACKS LEFT S.W. GEORGETOWN & CAPITOL HILL. IT'S YOUR TURN NOW!! BLACKS ARE HERE TO STAY." Surfacing the anger many Black residents felt towards the serial forced displacement they underwent, the April 1974 admonition precipitated a special and especially tense AMO meeting. Several weeks later, Pierce wrote an open letter that expounded on the mural's message, writing "there are a lot of people in this community that say they don't want another Georgetown, but they aren't doing a thing to prevent it from happening." In other words, it was time to take action, and well-wishing rhetoric would not get you off the hook.[49]

Tenant-led battles in response to eviction notices and sharp rent hikes further prompted AMO to act. Ordered to clear the building for a planned condominium conversion, a faction of tenants at Airy View refused orders to vacate, staying in place past their February eviction date. At the same time, Park Plaza tenants responded to an across the board 8% rent increase by going on strike, placing their March rent in escrow instead of paying it to the landlord. AMO organized a solidarity rally and press conference with leaders from these and other buildings, vowing to use the courts, city agencies, and street protests to keep the tenants in place. The Housing Committee also worked to develop a policy platform, which it released that May. The platform called for the preservation of Adams Morgan's present racial and economic mix, stronger tenant protections,

[49] Nahikian, interview by Dekker, May 11, 2016; Carol Richards and Jonathan Rowe, "Restoring the City: Who Pays the Price?" *Working Papers for a New Society* 4, no. 4 (Winter 1977), 56; Walter Pierce, "An Open Letter to the Community at Large Regarding: The Sign on the Wall at 18th and California Streets, NW," *The Columbian*, May 2, 1974, Washingtoniana Periodicals Collection.

and the development of alternatives to vulnerable rental housing such as scattered-site public housing, pathways for low-income households to purchase homes, and community land trusts. Committee members directly involved in the struggles at Airy View and Park Plaza also formed a spin-off group, the Adams Morgan Tenant Union, to strengthen their forces across buildings.[50]

The drastic rent increases and conversion of rental units at an alarming rate in Adams Morgan formed a particularly intense microcosm of processes taking place across Washington. Following the lifting of price controls Nixon had imposed in 1971 to curb inflation, rents soared throughout the city; one-fifth of District renters faced monthly increases of 10% or more in 1973. Price controls along with rising operating costs and renewed tenant activism also bit into the high rates of profit landlords had grown habituated to, leading many to put their buildings on the market. Selling the units piece by piece to owner-occupants, however, offered better prices than offloading the property to another landlord. In May 1974 alone, 2,871 rental units in DC were undergoing conversion. Given their high sale prices and sizeable down payments, particularly for renovated units, the vast majority of tenants were unable to remain in place.[51]

With the rental situation growing increasingly volatile—and in response to pressure from the City Wide Housing Coalition (CWHC) and DC chapter of the Public Interest Research Group (DC PIRG)—Mayor Washington petitioned the Nixon administration for the right to reinstate rent control at the local level, doing so in April and taking effect in June. Several months later, the appointed city council passed a sixty-day moratorium on condominium conversions. These

[50] Don Lehman, "Rent Hikes, Evictions Force Tenant Action," *The Columbian*, February 28, 1974, Washingtoniana Periodicals Collection; "AMO Pledges Fight Against Speculation," *The Columbian*, April 4, 1974; "AMO Housing Committee Platform," *The Columbian*, May 16, 1974, Washingtoniana Periodicals Collection; "Area Housing Activists Organize Tenant Union," *The Columbian*, June 6, 1974, Washingtoniana Periodicals Collection.
[51] Lawrence Feinberg, "Rent Increases in Most D.C. Apartments," *The Washington Post*, January 13, 1974; Thomas Lippman, "Condominiums Bring Bigger Profits," *The Washington Post*, May 27, 1974. On the recent history of condominium conversations in DC, see Carolyn Gallagher, *The Politics of Staying Put: Condo Conversion and Tenant Right-to-Buy in Washington, DC* (Philadelphia: Temple, 2016).

measures gave tenants some breathing room as well as leverage, yet the temporary nature of the condo freeze and multiple loopholes in the rent control bill severely blunted their impact. Barely six months after taking the position, Rent Control Commission Chair Timothy Jenkins publicly quit, citing lax enforcement and limited support from the mayor's office.[52]

By early 1975, conversions were again proceeding apace; AMO concluded its March community assembly by picketing outside the newly-condominium Woodley complex on Columbia Rd. They also immediately began plotting about how to take advantage of the shift towards home rule and presence of former activists on the elected council. Nahikian and AMO executive director Amiel Summers (Nahikian resigned in May 1974 to take an editorial position with Harper's Weekly but remained head of the Housing Committee) testified before the new council on strengthening the rent control law, calling for a better composition of commission members, a public education campaign to inform tenants of their rights, and additional funds for enforcement. Later that year, Nahikian was named to the Commission as a tenant advocate.[53]

While seeking to protect vulnerable renters in multifamily housing, AMO also hoped to put measures in place that would prevent the profit-driven flipping of single family homes it had witnessed earlier on Willard St. Alongside the Capitol East Housing Coalition (CEHC) and Metropolitan Washington Planning and Housing Association (MWPHA), AMO organized the conference "Blockbusting—1974 Style" to explore ways to prevent what it called 'reverse blockbusting': the invasion of low-income and predominantly Black or Latinx neighborhoods by rafts of white middle-class newcomers. The process, which British sociologist Ruth Glass termed

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[52] LaBarbara Bowman, "Law Signed Freezing D.C Apartment Rents," *The Washington Post*, April 27, 1974; "Tenants Push for Strong Rent Bill," *The Columbian*, June 20, 1974, Washingtoniana Periodicals Collection; LaBarbara Bowman, "Condominium Freeze Signed," *The Washington Post*, August 31, 1974.
[53] Dan Lehman, "AMO Assembly Pickets Woodley," *The Columbian*, March 31, 1975, Washingtoniana Periodicals Collection; Dan Lehman, "Community Testifies on Rent Control Hearings," *The Columbian*, January 31, 1975, Washingtoniana Periodicals Collection; Paul Valentine, "Mayor Names 9 to D.C. Rent Panel,' *The Washington Post*, September 24, 1975.

gentrification a decade earlier, reversed blockbusting's racial iconography yet produced similar results, dispossessing communities of color while enriching real estate interests. Outlining how it takes place, conference speakers described the pressure tactics real estate agents deployed to get longtime homeowners to sell quickly and at a low price, including pursuing tax liens and targeted enforcement of the housing code. Renovated (or often not) the properties were then resold for often twice the previous sale price or more to typically white households, facilitating the block's racial and economic transition and dispersing tenants and onetime homeowners to less desired corners of the city. Already well advanced on Capitol Hill, CEHC hoped to preserve the neighborhood's easternmost blocks for Black residents. AMO hoped to avoid a similar fate in Adams Morgan yet recognized it stood little chance of doing so without legislative supports.[54]

Growing out of its collaboration on the conference, AMO, CEHC, MWPHA, and the Shaw Project Area Committee (headed by Bill Street, formerly of the Black Land Movement) formed the Anti-Speculation Task Force that fall. Working with a team from the Tax Reform Research Group at Public Citizen, the Task Force drafted model legislation intent on curbing speculation. Modeled after similar bills in Vermont and Ontario, the legislation imposed sharp taxes on properties resold within a short time period; profits on homes sold within under a year could be subject to taxation as high as 70% depending on gain over original purchase price. For example, the gross profit from a home purchased for $20,000 and sold for $50,000 in less than a year would be taxed at 60% ($18,000). The Task Force found a receptive audience in Dave Clarke and Nadine Winter, councilmembers whose wards included Adams Morgan and Capitol Hill. In April, they co-introduced the "Real Estate Transaction Tax of 1975." Intended as a

[54] Duane Shank, "Reverse Blockbusting: Target for Speculators," *The Columbian*, June 20, 1974; Zeitz, *Private Urban Renewal*, 79-80; Ruth Glass, ed. *London: Aspects of Change* (London: Macgibbon & Kee, 1964).

stopgap measure, the bill was proposed to last for 12 months and applied only to those who sold two homes or more in a year, carving out homeowners who sold homes they had occupied.[55]

Knowing that a tough fight lay ahead, the Task Force launched a campaign seeking to educate the public on the bill and why it was needed. Its pamphlet "Our Neighborhoods for Sale" featured an image of a cigar-smoking baron and his money bags surrounded by ads clipped from the newspaper on investment properties in Adams Morgan, Capitol Hill, and Shaw. Drawing on tax records and real estate directories, it recounted eye-popping transactions with 230% rates of profit and $8,000 windfalls for properties held less than one day. Asserting that "land speculation is a sophisticated form of racism and discrimination," the pamphlet outlined not only direct displacement caused by profit-driven property churning but also spillover effects including inflated property tax assessments for low-income homeowners, the closure of small businesses due to lost customers and increased rents, and lack of access to community services. "Our Neighborhoods for Sale" also sought to address up front questions that would be raised in opposition to the bill, such as the role of speculative investment in restoring 'declining' areas and whether or not the tax would put a stop to all renovation, rejoining that "it is possible to clean up and fix neighborhoods without the inflationary profits going into the pockets of speculators who are just middlemen and without destroying whole neighborhoods." A prohibitively high tax on speculation, the Task Force argued, would stabilize both housing prices and DC neighborhoods more generally; its passage was a matter of not only economic fairness but also racial justice.[56]

[55] Katie Wells, "A Decent Place to Stay: Housing Crises, Failed Laws, and Property Conflicts in Washington, DC," diss., (Syracuse University, 2013), 99-100; Paul W. Valentine, "D.C. Real Estate Speculation Tax Urged," The Washington Post, April 2, 1975; Zeitz, *Private Urban Renewal*, 81.
[56] Adams Morgan Organization, Capital East Housing Coalition, and Public Citizen Tax Reform Research Group, "Our Neighborhoods for Sale," 1975, The Columbian Research Files, The People's Archive, DC Public Library.

The Task Force organized an impressive showing for the initial hearing on the tax that June. Over fifty testimonies were offered in support of the bill, including representatives from the Washington Teachers' Union and associations of Black ministers, police officers, and social workers. Task Force members presented a slide show on flipped properties in Adams Morgan and Capitol Hill and performed skits alongside evicted tenants, stressing throughout how land speculation chiefly benefitted white developers and homeowners to the detriment of Black tenants and longtime residents. Opponents of the bill, however, worked just as hard to unravel these connections. Black realtors and developers decried the tax, which they argued would undercut their hard-fought entry into the real estate industry and impede Black homeownership. By eliminating one of the few sources for profit in a city whose private economy was dominated by real estate, they asserted, the tax would arrest attempts to build Black economic power and in effect maintain white control over business affairs. Despite the common media portrayal of white newcomers displacing Black tenants from Capitol Hill, rehab industry representatives contended, the majority of renovated homes in the city were previously vacant and sold to Black households. Such arguments—which garnered applause from some longtime Black residents who had come out to show their support for the bill—muted the multiracial Task Force's efforts to portray property speculation as a Black and white matter not only racially but also morally. Still, backers of the tax left the June hearing with the sense that momentum was on their side. [57]

Largely caught off guard by the bill's introduction, the local real estate industry formed the Washington Residential Development Coalition (WRDC) shortly thereafter and launched a comprehensive counterattack. The WRDC maintained the tax would effectively end all private

[57] Richards and Rowe, "Restoring the City," 56-58; Wells, "Decent Place to Stay," 120-137; Zeitz, *Private Urban Renewal,* 81-82. On 'landlord power' and the complex political alliances between white and Black real estate actors, see N. D. B. Connolly, *A World More Concrete: Real Estate and the Remaking of Jim Crow South Florida* (Chicago: Chicago, 2014).

residential redevelopment in the city, halting restoration efforts and sending developers back to the suburbs—an argument repeated by officials in the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) anxious to court investment. The WRDC further contended that the tax would drive unemployment, already painfully high, by drying up opportunities for contractors. To spread their message, the industry coalition hired a prominent Black lobbyist and funded a study discrediting the policy recommendations undergirding the bill. They also sent letters to homeowners contending the tax would dent their property values and further deplete the city's tax base, urging them to attend the hearings in opposition. More generally, the industry argued that the tax was negative when positive inducements were needed to spur housing production.[58]

With the real estate industry gaining ground, the Task Force released a statement in October demanding the Council "stop pussy footing…and pass a Real Estate Transfer Tax." As "our neighborhoods are being sold out from under us," AMO and CHEC also called for Mayor Washington to impose a moratorium on applicable sales in the meantime. Marion Barry, chair of the Committee on Finance and Revenue, responded by scheduling additional hearings on the bill for November and December. A response to the Task Force's demand for action, further hearings also furnished Barry a chance to explore how the original six-page bill submitted by Clarke and Winter might be modified and potentially moderated. While Barry was aiming for compromise, the brutal daylong hearings instead reaffirmed the depth of the conflict, with the Task Force dismissing any proposed changes as selling out to special interests and the WRDC deriding the bill as "a flirtation with socialism" that was blatantly unconstitutional.[59]

[58] Wells, "Decent Place to Stay," 127-131; Zeitz, *Private Urban Renewal*, 81-82
[59] Anti-Speculation Task Force, "News Release," October 16, 1975, Box 1, Marie S. Nahikian Papers; LaBarbara Bowman, "Land Speculators, City Groups Clash," *The Washington Post*, December 10, 1975.

Some on the Task Force took charges of socialism as an opening, with Nahikian rejoining that "housing should not be a private thing…it should be state-owned and state-controlled… housing is much too vital to be left to people who are only interested in profit." More often, though, the Task Force's stance towards property rights was ambiguous and its attitude towards homeownership unquestioned. As Katie Wells has argued, this left the Task Force vulnerable, as it struggled to clearly delineate between the speculation it sought to curb and appropriate forms of development. While united against the slumlords who sat on buildings as they deteriorated and middlemen who profited from briefly holding contracts while adding nothing, the coalition was less resolute on how to treat renovations, whether profit was acceptable at all and if so how much, and where to place owner-occupied 'urban homesteading' within this spectrum. Viewing the bill as an emergency response to a widening crisis, the Task Force held these answers could be fully worked out once the immediate threat was met and further displacement forestalled.[60]

If the Task Force's long-term goals were muddled, those of the WRDC were clear. The real estate industry wanted to squash the tax entirely, concerned that it set a dangerous precedent for further legislative incursion into its profit margins. In March, the coalition sponsored a dinner with councilmembers dedicated to a discussion of the legislation and its potential consequences, including barely veiled threats of a capital strike. Two days later, AMO dedicated the majority of its semiannual community assembly to a discussion of the bill, urging members to advocate for its passage as well as the inclusion of a trigger mechanism that would enable it to take immediate effect. By this time, however, the bill had languished in committee for nearly a year and pressure

[60] Charles A. Krause, "Neighborhood Units Ask Tax on Realty Speculation," *The Washington Post*, October 17. 1975; Wells, "Decent Place to Stay," 122-124, 137-140.

from below had started to crest. Initially backing a levy on gross profit, Barry began to walk back from the proposed tax's more stringent mandates, leaving its fate uncertain that spring.[61]

The price of legislative postponement became vividly clear that April when twenty-six Black families received eviction notices on Seaton Street. Located in the southeast corner of Adams Morgan, Center Properties had purchased half of the 1700 block with the intention of renovating the properties for resale at around $70,00 each, starting demolition even while tenants remained on site. The situation was reminiscent of the Willard Street fight two years earlier—except this time AMO was prepared. Springing into action, the group secured civil rights lawyer Johnny Barnes to represent the tenants, who had received thirty-day eviction notices despite the ninety-day period required by the recently passed rent control law. The Rental Accommodations Act of 1975 further stipulated that tenants be offered right of first refusal to purchase their homes when put up for sale, a requirement both the previous owners and Centre Properties ignored. Barnes filed an injunction to ensure the ninety days were honored and to halt the construction. He also moved to vacate the sales on the grounds that the transactions had been conducted in violation of section 301 of the act, and that the tenants be given the option to purchase the homes at the price paid by Center Properties. Seaton Street tenants received further support from councilmember Clarke, anxious to demonstrate his commitment to fighting speculation while his tax proposal gathered dust. Clarke ordered inspectors from DCHD to investigate Centre's compliance with the housing code; they found 573 violations. In addition to forcing the developer to make immediate repairs, he introduced emergency legislation mandating units

[61] Zeitz, *Private Urban Renewal,* 81-82; Blair Gately, "Speculation Bill Support Urged by AMO Council," *The Columbian*, April 1976, Washingtoniana Periodicals Collection; Richards and Rowe, "Restoring the City," 60; LaBarbara Bowman, "Real Estate Tax Bill Delayed," *The Washington Post*, July 15, 1976.

under eviction orders remain habitable, with jail time as a potential penalty for landlords who flout the law.[62]

Leading the Seaton Street charge for AMO alongside Nahikian was Frank Smith, who had been elected chair of the community assembly the previous fall. A SNCC veteran, Smith had helped to organize the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party and led its cooperative economic development efforts, including a proposed brick factory. Smith moved to Washington in 1968 as an IPS fellow, following others involved in the Institute to the Adams Morgan neighborhood. While working on projects related to education and urban planning, issues with an intransigent landlord led Smith to get involved locally, first on his tenants' association and then with AMO. Throughout 1975 Smith, Nahikian, and others on the Housing Committee explored the formation of a cooperative housing trust, going so far as to begin discussions with a local property owner on purchasing their buildings. The potential for multiple low-income tenants to own their own homes on a single block led them to refocus these efforts on Seaton Street.[63]

In order to advance their right to purchase case through Superior Court, the Seaton Street tenants needed to demonstrate the viability of their offers, which few were equipped to do. To gather money for the down payments, AMO and other supporters organized multiple fundraisers, from dinner parties in the street and blockwide yard sales to pass-the-hat nights at bars on 18th St. They also sent flyers to all AMO members urging neighbors to support the fund. Asking "Who Is Going to Own Adams Morgan?" the brochure called residents to "stand and fight" alongside the

[62] Alice Bonner, "26 Families Fight Order to Move Out," *The Washington Post*, April 24, 1976; Amiel Summers, Seaton Place Residents Fight Eviction Notices," *The Columbian*, May 1976, Washingtoniana Periodicals Collection; David Clarke to Arlene Gill, April 25, 1976, Box 1, Marie S. Nahikian Papers; "Seaton Place Violations Reach 959," *The Washington Star*, May 18, 1976.
[63] Frank Smith, interview by James Lloyd, January 20, 2011, accessed at *Adams Morgan Plaza*, https://admoplaza.com/2016/06/18/plaza-history/; Adams Morgan Organization, "The AMO Coop Housing Trust," 1975, The Columbian Research Files; Adams Morgan Organization, "Is Your Neighborhood—Seaton Place—For Sale? Flyer," October 1975, Box 1, Marie S. Nahikian Papers.

Black tenants of Seaton Street, "or 16th Street will be the new Berlin Wall [and] Adams Morgan will be white and upper class." In addition to enlisting this wider circle, AMO organizers also had to convince the tenants it was worth the fight. Wanting to forgo months of uncertainty, and enticed by small cash payouts and forgiven back rent, multiple families departed in May. Many were understandably skeptical that they would make it to the other side—not only would they need to raise a $4,000 down payment and secure a mortgage, they would also need to complete full renovations in order to bring their property up to code and enjoy safe and decent housing.[64]

While a crucial first step, squirreled away savings and the generosity of strangers were insufficient to get Seaton Street residents across the finish line. They needed access to substantial capital, a difficult proposition given the discriminatory practices of Washington's financial institutions. As the tenants and AMO assessed their limited options, an opportunity presented itself at the corner of 18th and Columbia. Perpetual Federal Savings and Loan Association, among the area's largest thrift institutions, announced its intention to open a branch on the BP lot pending approval from the Federal Home Loan Bank Board (FHLBB). When initial overtures to Perpetual on behalf of the tenants gained little traction, AMO began to explore more formal ways to pressure the bank, including contesting its application to the FHLBB.[65]

AMO had evidence of loan denials in Adams Morgan, including sworn affidavits from qualified applicants who were turned away by Perpetual. To fully make the case that the bank neglected the concerns of area residents, though, AMO needed to arm itself with information. It

[64] Lloyd Gray, "Adams-Morgan Eviction Battle," *The Washington Post*, July 1, 1976; Adams Morgan Organization, "Who Is Going to Own Adams Morgan? Flyer," 1976, The Columbian Research Files; Joe Ritchie, "City Charges 959 Housing Code Violations," *The Washington Post*, May 20, 1976; Adams Morgan Organization, "Letter to Seaton St. Residents," May 14, 1976, Box 1, Marie S. Nahikian Papers; James Lloyd, "Fighting Redlining and Gentrification in Washington, D.C.: The Adams-Morgan Organization and Tenant Right to Purchase," *The Journal of Urban History* 42, no. 6 (2016), 1099-1100.
[65] Cynthia Rose, "BP Lot Scene of Changes," *The Columbian*, June 1976, Washingtoniana Periodicals Collection; Adams Morgan Organization, "Letter to Seaton St. Residents."

received research assistance from two sources. DC PIRG, led by Jim Vitarello, had released a study the previous year documenting how less than 12% of real estate loans originated by DC-based S&Ls went to property located in the city. The report further detailed how majority-Black zip codes comprising 69% of the city's population received only 36% of the city's total loan volume; of these loans nearly half went to the rapidly gentrifying Capitol Hill neighborhood. DC PIRG provided the group with data it had collected on Perpetual showing its disparate deposit vs. lending rates in the city. At the same time, Perpetual was one of only two white-owned thrifts who lent east of Rock Creek Park at all, rendering it a somewhat softer campaign target.[66]

AMO received additional support from Fields of Plenty coop member Eddie Becker, who launched the Perpetual Research Group that summer. The opposition research project documented the web of relationships that entangled Perpetual's board with real estate interests, the zoning board, and the city council, ones that included not only campaign contributions but inherent conflicts of interest. Becker's investigation lent further credence to the claim that Perpetual had historically redlined the Adams Morgan and Mount Pleasant zip codes, detailing deposit vs. lending ratios of 5-to-1. It also, however, revealed a troubling reversal: in 1975 this ratio shrank to 5-to-4 as Perpetual moved to cash in on the renovation movement and return of white middle class residents to the city. Characterizing this see-saw movement as "the economics of community destabilization," the Perpetual Research Group demonstrated how instantly flooding an area with capital could be as detrimental as historically depriving it.[67]

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[66] D.C. Public Interest Research Group, *Redlining: Mortgage Disinvestment in the District of Columbia* (Washington: DC PIRG, Institute for Local Self-Reliance, Institute for Policy Studies, 1975); Lloyd, "Fighting Redlining and Gentrification," 1100-1101.

[67] Perpetual Research Group, "Why Does Perpetual Want to Move into the Adams Morgan, Mt. Pleasant & North Dupont Communities?" 1976, The Columbian Research Files; on gentrification and the see-saw movement of capital in the built urban environment, see Neil Smith, "Gentrification and Uneven Development," *Economic Geography* 58, no. 2 (April 1982), 139-155.

In September, AMO held a referendum on its public stance towards Perpetual as part of its annual 1976 election. The plebiscite asked members if the bank should be able to locate a branch at 18th and Columbia, offering the responses "YES," "NO," and "MAYBE if AMO can work out agreements to safeguard the community interest." Endorsing the third option, Smith and the Executive Council hoped to extract concessions as a condition of support, securing both mortgages for Seaton Street residents and wider commitments to equitable banking and lending. Others weren't so sure: *Columbian* editor Pablo Sanchez cast the Seaton deal as a long shot and called for a "NO" vote as part of a "last stand against speculation" by Black and Latinx residents. Of the nearly 600 responses, 42% voted no, 30% voted maybe if…, and 28% voted yes. The split vote both committed AMO to advocate against the branch and left a door ajar for negotiation. Perpetual soon responded with a public relations blitz, donating to an afterschool program and conducting its own neighborhood survey to counter AMO's referendum.[68]

Several weeks after the referendum AMO filed a brief with the FHLBB contesting the branch opening, charging that Perpetual's mortgage products did not meet the needs of the area's low- and moderate-income residents and that its lending practices discriminated against racial minorities. The filing further contended that Perpetual, which as a mutual savings and loan was owned by its borrowers and depositors, lacked mechanisms for accountability. Their request was turned down, with the FHLBB asserting AMO's claims were insufficient to block the application. Undeterred, Smith and others reiterated these points in-person, testifying before the FHLBB in Atlanta that November. They also recruited the local ANC, whose leadership

[68] "AMO To Hold Referendum," *The Columbian*, August 1976, Washingtoniana Periodicals Collection; Editorial, "BP Lot, Black and Latino Last Stand Against Speculation?," *The Columbian*, September 1976, Washingtoniana Periodicals Collection; The National Urban Coalition, *Neighborhood Transition Without Displacement: A Citizen's Handbook* (Washington: National Urban Coalition, 1979), 20 Juan Williams, "S&L Gift to Library Stirs Dispute," *The Washington Post*, November 11, 1976; Thomas J. Owen to Adams Morgan Customers, November 2, 1976, accessed at *Adams Morgan Plaza*, https://admoplaza.com/2016/06/18/plaza-history/.

overlapped heavily with AMO, and the Council of Hispanic Agencies and Community Groups to file additional petitions against the branch. Part of a growing community reinvestment movement nationwide, AMO's efforts to block the branch opening—or more accurately, back the bank into a corner so that it would come to the bargaining table—informed the drafting of the Community Reinvestment Act by Senator William Proxmire's staff several months later. The legislation, which sought to reduce discriminatory lending in low and moderate income neighborhoods, mandating reporting on credit allocation and provided community groups with grounds for challenging mergers, acquisitions, and branch applications based on a bank's lending record. Both the AMO/ANC petition to deny the branch application and proposed AMO/ANC and Perpetual agreement were featured prominently at hearings prior to its October 1977 passage. [69]

Bullish at the outset, Perpetual began to quietly consider compromise as the additional briefings ground its branch application to a halt. In the winter of 1977, with a ruling date still indeterminate, the bank opened negotiations with representatives of AMO, several area ANCs, and the Hispanic council. Having worked out a list of demands in consultation with DC PIRG, AMO came to the table ready. While the S&L did not agree to every objective the group sought —such as seating an ANC representative on the branch's board of directors—the concessions AMO achieved for withdrawing its objection were nonetheless considerable. In July, Perpetual agreed to provide loans of up to 90% for low- and moderate-income applicants and nonprofit cooperatives, fund housing counseling services, maintain a bilingual branch staff, and establish

[69] "AMO Speaks Out Against Perpetual Branch Office," *The Columbian*, November 1976, Washingtoniana Periodicals Collection; Douglas C. Lyons, "Adams-Morgan Group Loses Bid Against S&L," *The Washington Post*, October 7, 1976; Smith, interview by Lloyd, January 20, 2011; U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs: Hearings on S. 406 To Encourage Financial Institutions to Help Meet the Credit needs of the Communities in which they are Chartered, and for other Purposes, 95th Cong., 1st. sess., 1977, 68-131;U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs: Hearings on Problems of Dislocation and Diversity in Communities Undergoing Neighborhood Revitalization Activity, 95th Cong., 1st. sess., 1977, 34-43; Rebecca K. Marchiel, *After Redlining: The Urban Reinvestment Movement in the Era of Financial Deregulation* (Chicago: Chicago, 2020), 135-146.

an advisory committee to review loan denials and monitor the terms of the agreement. The bank further consented to preserve public space at the corner as part of the building's design, enabling produce vendors to continue to operate and community groups to congregate. Even the *Post* recognized its significance, noting how the agreement "marks the first time a federal banking agency has formally accepted a written settlement between a savings-and-loan association and a protesting community group." The FHLBB approved the branch application shortly thereafter.[70]

The Perpetual agreement was not AMO's only victory in July. On the 14th, the nine remaining Seaton Street families purchased their homes. Part of an out of court settlement with Centre Properties, the tenants were able to do so at prices close to what the developer had paid the year before. A collaborative effort unprecedented in the city's history, the tenants and AMO raised the money for down payments, Perpetual provided mortgages with only 10% down, and the city agreed to finance and complete the renovations at an uncommonly low 3% interest rate (the 1977 average was closer to 9%). In order to accomplish this last feat, Clarke passed special legislation rendering the block eligible to receive Community Development Block Grant funding despite being outside the designated service area. Proclaimed by Smith "the first successful attempt to prevent the decimation of a street," the results on Seaton were more qualified. Subject to constant construction hassles, a majority of the tenants had already left, waiving their right to purchase for $250 and enabling Centre to largely proceed with its plan to flip the block.[71]

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[70] Robert F. Levey, "Federal board expected to decide soon on proposed S & L branch for Adams-Morgan," *The Washington Post*, March 31, 1977; Robert F. Levey, "Protest filed on Bank," *The Washington Post*, April 7, 1977; "Loan Policy Agreement Between Perpetual Federal Savings and Loan Association and Adams Morgan Organization et al," July 1977, Box 1, Marie S. Nahikian Papers; Editorial, "Good News from Adams Morgan," *The Washington Post*, August 30, 1977; Martha Hamilton, "Compromise Reached on S&L Branch," *The Washington Post*, July 28, 1977; Robert F. Levey, "Perpetual Branch Approved," *The Washington Post*, August 25, 1977.

[71] Adams Morgan Organization, "Seaton Street Settlement Press Release," July 14, 1977, Box 1, Marie S. Nahikian Papers; William Raspberry, "Team Effort on Seaton Place," *The Washington Post*, April 13, 1977; LaBarbara Bowman, "Renters on Block Win Right to Buy At Modest Price," *The Washington Post*, May 26, 1977; Rich Bruning, "Seaton Street Battle, Perpetual Oversight Highlight AMO Victories," *Rock Creek Monitor*, March 22, 1979, Washingtoniana Periodicals Collection, The People's Archive, DC Public Library.

Still, the Seaton Street experience was hailed for providing low-income tenants tools to not only stay in their neighborhood amidst displacement pressures but receive a measure of security through homeownership. It also acted as proof of concept, furnishing a model for others to emulate. The following spring, five families facing eviction on 12th Place NW in the Cardozo neighborhood were able to repeat Seaton Street's success on a much quicker timeframe, securing down payments and purchase and rehabilitation loans within forty-five days. AMO assisted the 12th Place tenants, helping them navigate the process and connecting them with Perpetual. More consequentially, the effective deployment of section 301 on Seaton Street gave hope to tenants citywide, helping to spark a movement and spurring the passage of the Tenant Opportunity to Purchase Act as part of the larger Rental Housing Conversion and Sale Act of 1980. [72]

What AMO hoped would be another tool for keeping low-income tenants in their homes also resurfaced in the spring of 1978: the speculation tax. In the three years since the bill was first introduced, however, its stipulations had grown significantly weaker under pressure from the WRDC and the mayor's office. Buildings over four units were made exempt, as were sellers who sold less than three homes a year. The first 15% of profits from any sale were also exempt, meaning those who simply held on to titles could continue to make quick gains. Most critically, an amendment put forward by Barry exempted a renovated property if its seller extended a one-year warranty to the buyer on the house's structure and mechanical systems. Efforts by Clarke and a minority of councilmembers to overturn the warranty exemption failed; that the Task Force formed to secure the passage of a strong bill had long since fallen apart did not help. Clearing the

[72] Patricia Camp, "Fighting to Stay," *The Washington Post*, March 6, 1978; Lloyd, "Fighting Redlining and Gentrification," 1102; Blair Gately, "Tenant Rebellion Fueled by Increases in Rent, Evictions," *The Washington Post*, March 23, 1978; Amanda Huron, "Creating a Commons in the Capital: The Emergence of Limited Equity Cooperatives in Washington, D.C.," *Washington History* 26, no. 2 (2014), 59-60; Asch and Musgrove, "We are Headed for Some Bad Trouble," 117-120.

council in March, the bill became law in June following Congressional review. While highly attenuated, it remained significant as the first tax on urban real estate speculation in the US.[73]

As the decade drew to a close, AMO leaders sought to translate the Seaton Street and speculation tax achievements into broader lessons, both providing paths for activists in other cities to follow and developing programs that empowered low-income tenants. Smith's 1979 dissertation "Neighborhood Based Strategies to Prevent Displacement" further expounded on the community benefits agreement AMO reach with Perpetual and the campaigns of other groups such as San Antonio's Communities Organized for Public Services and the Seattle Displacement Coalition. Its recommendations also informed *Neighborhood Transition without Displacement: A Citizen's Handbook*, published by the National Urban Coalition. That same year, Nahikian took a position in DHCD as part of the new Barry administration where she helped to build the tenant purchase program. Institutionalizing the Seaton Street experience, the program established legal mechanisms and funding channels for converting to tenant ownership while preserving long-term affordability and offered technical assistance to groups throughout the process. Yet even as they bolstered tenant battles locally and nationally, AMO's hard-fought victories against speculation and displacement came at a high cost to the organization—by the time it secured the right of residents to remain on Seaton Street AMO could no longer meet the quorum necessary to make binding decisions at the community assembly.[74]

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[73] Milton Coleman, "City Council Takes New Posture on Speculation Tax," The Washington Post, February 22, 1978; Wells, "Decent Place to Stay," 146-148; Richards and Jonathan Rowe, "Restoring the City," 59-60.
[74] Frank Smith, "Neighborhood Based Strategies to Prevent Displacement," diss., (Union Graduate School, 1979); The National Urban Coalition, *Neighborhood Transition Without Displacement*; Kathleen Ennis, "Barry Promises ANCs Housing 'Policy Paper'," *The Washington Post*, June 7, 1979; Nahikian, interview by Meghelli, July 21, 2017. Most narratives on the emergence of community benefits agreements locate their origins in Los Angeles in the 1990s; I draw on that language here in order to locate them within a longer genealogy of compacts between community-based organizations and real estate and financial interests intended to secure more equitable forms of development. For an example of the standard historical narrative, see Patricia E. Salkin and Amy Lavine, "Negotiating for Social Justice and the Promise of Community Benefits Agreements: Case Studies of Current and Developing Agreements," *Journal of Affordable Housing* 17, no. 1-2 (Fall 2007/Winter 2008), 115-120.

"It's Fought Too Hard to Stay Alive to Die": The Slow Demobilization of AMO

As AMO raised its flag for the first time at the corner of 18th and Columbia, close observers were beginning to express concerns about the organization's future. "The banner flying against the clear spring sky belies the dark clouds hanging over AMO," an April 1975 *Columbian* editorial warned, noting how the group could not afford to pay its rent or recently hired executive director Amiel Summers, facilitating his resignation. Attendance at assemblies was also down, with crowds of 100-120 at the past two meetings half of what they had been the year before. "Unless AMO can rally itself," the paper cautioned, "it will continue to suffer from a seriously ailing image and its leadership, which Adams Morgan needs, will erode further." Disputing this bleak assessment, Nahikian countered in a letter to the editor that "AMO has never had any money" and yet remains "the most effective community organization in this city." Instead of chastising the highly committed members fighting an uphill battle against "outside economic forces over which AMO has little or no control," why didn't it encourage others in Adams Morgan to join the battle? The paper, she concluded, was laying the blame for AMO's setbacks in the wrong place, writing "it is much easier to criticize ourselves and not appreciate the outside pressures which are sometimes so intangible." Indeed, by this time multiple factors were conspiring to reduce mass participation in AMO, ones which included but extended beyond its persistently troubled finances and all-encompassing campaigns to counter displacement.[75]

Ironically, one of the events that curtailed involvement in AMO was the advent of home rule. In June of 1973, when AMO held its first executive council election, residents lacked any channels for political representation or electoral participation beyond the school boards. One year later, dozens of candidates were vying to take their place on the city's first elected council

[75] Editorial, "AMO at the Crossroads – Bleak Outlook, *The Columbian*, March 31, 1975; Marie Nahikian, "Letter the Editor," *The Columbian*, July 15, 1975, Washingtoniana Periodicals Collection.

in a century. To many, the chance to elect representatives with the power to shape policy proved more attractive than the experiment in direct democracy taking place in Adams Morgan. With residents turning their attention to the upcoming Democratic primary, participation in the AMO elections declined by 40% in 1974. AMO also struggled to recruit executive council candidates, with most running unopposed and multiple seats left open. Expanded opportunities for advocacy at the city level—not only were the councilmembers now elected and thus in theory accountable to their constituents, many were also former activists indebted to their grassroots supporters—further contributed to a decline in attendance at AMO's community assemblies.[76]

The charter that granted the District qualified home rule also authorized the formation of Advisory Neighborhood Councils, later changed to Advisory Neighborhood Commissions (ANCs). Kotler, the intellectual force behind the neighborhood movement who worked with AMO to develop its governance model, helped to draft the legislation. Like AMO, the ANCs were to be elected councils drawn from single member districts that concerned themselves with "planning, streets, recreation, social services programs, health, safety, and sanitation." The ANCs could also employ staff and expend public and donated funds within their service areas. Unlike AMO's vision of neighborhood government, however, the ANC's powers were chiefly advisory and deferred ultimately to the city council. Throughout 1974, AMO debated how it would relate to the new ANC structure, which it viewed as limited even while inspiring its creation. Writing in *The Columbian*, Nahikian noted some of the important differences: AMO's power was rooted in the community assembly, it was built from the ground up rather than instituted from above by law, and it exercised critical independence from the city government and municipal agencies. At the same time, how exactly the ANCs would take shape remained unclear, including how their

[76] "New AMO Council Elected in Light Vote," *The Columbian*, August 1, 1974, Washingtoniana Periodicals Collection; Henig, *Gentrification in Adams Morgan*, 46.

boundaries would be determined and whether they would incorporate independently, and AMO wanted to be at the table as such decisions were made. Members of the executive council also feared that the ANC, in duplicating some of its functions, would threaten AMO's existence.[77]

In 1975, AMO petitioned the city to become the ANC for Adams Morgan, which would have allowed it to receive government imprimatur and funding while remaining responsive to the community assembly. When this request was denied due to its potential for legal complications, AMO leadership decided to run for the ANC offices as individuals. The inaugural ANC election in February 1976 saw "confusion and apathy running neck-and-neck," according to the *Post*, with a chaotic Board of Elections rollout and low voter turnout abetted by the city council's lack of promotion. AMO, however, was ready: members of the executive council claimed eight of ANC 1C01's ten seats. Smith was elected chair of the commission and Nahikian its treasurer. Founders Jackson and Klein, AMO's new unsalaried executive director John Jones, and three other executive council members also held posts. Confirming AMO's continued political clout, the near sweep of the ANC also enabled dual and mutually reinforcing organizational structures to emerge, with Smith reporting that "at least half of the ANC's activity is the same as AMO's …it's a complimentary relationship." The ANC, for example, helped carry on the fight to deny Perpetual's FHLBB application when AMO's initial request was turned down and acted as a legal party to the final agreement. It also lent increased weight to AMO's recommendations before the city council, such as its calls for the purchase of Community Park West.[78]

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[77] Milton Kotler, "ECCO bene: Milton Kotler is Father of ANCs and the Neighborhood Government Movements," interview by Carl Lankowski, Historic Chevy Chase DC, August 25, 2012, https://www.historicchevychasedc.org/oral-histories/milton-kotler/; District of Columbia Self-Government and Governmental Reorganization Act, Pub. L. No. 93-118, 87 Stat. 774 (1973); Marie Nahikian, "AMO" Good Model for ANC's," *The Columbian*, November 21, 1974, Washingtoniana Periodicals Collection; Pablo Sanchez, "AMO Holds Last Assembly of 1974," *The Columbian*, December 12, 1974, Washingtoniana Periodicals Collection.
[78] John Jones, "Testimony Before the District of Columbia City Council on Advisory Neighborhood Councils," May 14, 1975, Box 1, Marie S. Nahikian Papers; Dan Lehman, "AMO Claims Progress and Coexistence with ANCs," *The Columbian*, February 1976, Washingtoniana Periodicals Collection; Blair Gately, "Low ANC Vote Blamed on

Initially symbiotic, the ANC gradually supplanted AMO as the neighborhood power base in the mid to late 1970s, with participation in ANC meetings and elections increasing as those in AMO assemblies and elections declined. Members attributed the drop in involvement to multiple sources. Jones, the infrequently paid staffer who followed Summers, linked the attrition to the Seaton Street and Perpetual fights, which distracted from day-to-day operations and the ongoing base building needed to sustain a mass organization. Others cited AMO's overextension and the burnout of its core activists or the tedium of long, drawn out meetings. To some tenant leaders, AMO had grown less willing to take risks, moderating its style out of concern for respectability. For Nahikian, AMO's deterioration was a symptom of its distance from its early roots in direct democracy. In her view, the organization had grown rigid and bureaucratic under Smith's leadership, with less opportunities for community and council input. By narrowing nearly all of its focus to housing, the group forfeited its role "as a place for everybody to get involved" and lost its ability to "harness the efforts of individuals, buildings, and blocks to the struggles of the community as a whole." Further, Nahikian and other founders worried that AMO, in contrast to its original purpose, was being used as a platform for advancing individual political ambitions.[79]

By 1978, key members of AMO's leadership had begun to look beyond the neighborhood and the limited powers of ANCs. Smith challenged Clarke for the Ward 1 seat in the Democratic primary, touting his Seaton Street experience as the basis for a self-help style homeownership program that would provide low- and moderate-income households who work on their homes

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Gov't Stall," *The Columbian*, March 1976, Washingtoniana Periodicals Collection; Editorial, "Unhappy Returns of the Day," *The Washington Post*, February 16, 1976; Paul W. Valentine, "Board Confirms Most ANC Winners," *The Washington Post*, February 21, 1976; Blair Gately, "ANC's Still No Money," *The Columbian*, April 1976; Douglas C. Lyons, "City Provides Funds for Advisory Commissions," *The Washington Post*, August 19, 1976.

[79] Henig, *Gentrification in Adams Morgan*, 37-38, 43-45; Rich Bruning, "Seaton Street Battle, Perpetual Oversight Highlight AMO Victories," Rock Creek Monitor, March 22, 1979, Washingtoniana Periodicals Collection; Rich Bruning, "Early AMO Years Marked by Much Activity," Rock Creek Monitor, March 8, 1979, Washingtoniana Periodicals Collection; Betsy Schmidt, "AMO Activists Say Future Looks Bright," Rock Creek Monitor, April 5, 1979, Washingtoniana Periodicals Collection.

with down payment assistance. Hoping to distinguish himself from an incumbent with whom he had worked side by side, Smith tacked to the right on social issues, attacking Clarke's support for marijuana decriminalization. Nahikian also ran for the council, seeking an at-large seat as part of a crowded Democratic field. Critical of Smith's use of AMO as a springboard, she justified her own aspirations by positioning her campaign as one front of the citywide tenant's movement, proposing a suite of policy reforms that would help keep vulnerable renters and low-income homeowners facing rising property taxes in place. She further called for the strengthening of ANCs, enabling them to have a hand in policy through the presentation of an annual agenda before the council. Each lost their primaries, with Smith trailing Clarke by a margin of 4-to-1 and Nahikian coming in fourth for the at-large seat. While demonstrating how AMO's wins might be implemented citywide, Smith and Nahikian's campaigns took a toll on the organization, dividing its membership and confirming the diminished influence of the community assembly.[80]

Beyond expanded forums for electoral politics, AMO's ability to build grassroots power was ultimately thwarted by the economic forces it had long struggled against. Hundreds of low-income Black and Latinx households were displaced from the neighborhood across the decade, shrinking the organization's desired membership base and overwhelming its efforts to preserve racial and economic diversity. "Speculation took a double toll," Nahikian reflected, as those who took their place had less incentive to join the group: "as people get wealthier, they have less need to cooperate." It was also controversial when they did, as the rising ratio of newcomers—and the taming effect their presence had on the group's politics and tactics—sparked concerns that AMO itself was being gentrified. Like those it sought to defend, AMO was evicted from its office when

[80] "Ward 1: Democrats, U.S. Labor and Socialists in Race," *The Washington Post*, September 8, 1978; Frank Smith, "Council Candidate Speaks," *Rock Creek Monitor*, June 22, 1978, Washingtoniana Periodicals Collection; "At-Large Council Race Has Bids from 11 Candidates," *The Washington Post*, September 7, 1978; "D.C. Primary Election Results," *The Washington Post*, September 14, 1978.

a new property owner took over; after losing their challenge in court the organization took up residence with the ANC. The same thing would happen to Nahikian several years later, who was forced to move in 1981 when her home was put up for sale, a painful irony covered in the *Post*. While continuing to support sporadic fights, such as resident-led efforts to prevent a planned Hilton hotel expansion, AMO could no longer be counted on to spearhead such campaigns and struggled to survive at all, with attendance at its community assemblies dwindling to dozens.[81]

"To Control What Happens in Our Community": AMO's Political and Economic Coordinates

AMO's quest for control over the fate of Adams Morgan formed one front of a growing movement for neighborhood autonomy and community-driven development. In 1975, Kotler and Nahikian hosted a gathering of similar organizations from eastern and midwestern cities, leading to the formation of the Alliance for Neighborhood Government. Using AMO as a case study, attendees discussed the strategic dilemmas that confronted urban neighborhoods and efforts to revitalize them politically and economically against the era's setbacks. What could be done to counter the growing political apathy and create meaningful channels for citizen participation? How could neighborhoods recover and prosper, and how could they do so without facilitating the displacement of their lower-income residents? Should neighborhoods seek to govern themselves independently or increase their leverage within the prevailing system? Leaving the room divided, the contrasting responses attendees offered revealed the fragile coalition behind the fight for the neighborhood at a meeting intended to cement its unity. Like the larger movement it was part of, AMO's dual impulses towards autonomy and equity at times found themselves in competition. [82]

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[81] Bruning, "Early AMO Years"; Henig, *Gentrification in Adams Morgan*, 34-35, 42-43; Blair Gately, "AMO Ordered to Vacate," *The Columbian*, January-February 1977, Washingtoniana Periodicals Collection; LaBarbara Bowman, "Marie Nahikian: City Housing Activist Displacement Victim," *The Washington Post*, July 17, 1981; Blair Gately, "Tenants Protest Hilton Attempt to Expand," *The Washington Post*, August 9, 1979.

[82] Alliance for Neighborhood Government, "Report on Proceedings: Eastern Region Neighborhood Government Meeting," 1975, Box 1, Marie S. Nahikian Papers; Looker, "Visions of Autonomy," 586-590; Nicholas von Hoffman, Self-Rule and Local Government: Holding onto a Dream," *The Washington Post*, June 30, 1975.

The 'Do It Yourself' ethos exemplified by the neighborhood movement also garnered the attention of policymakers exploring decentralized—and less expensive—approaches to solving urban problems. Established by the National Neighborhood Policy Act of 1977, the National Commission on Neighborhoods sought to amplify the role of local communities within federal policy and grantmaking and develop recommendations on combatting urban decline. Displaying the movement's peak strength, the presidentially appointed commission was further indicative of the growing urge to "think small" in urban policy, with both the Carter administration and many advocates emphasizing local control and private-public partnership over large-scale interventions and ambitious social programs. Comprising one of the forty case studies in its report *People, Building Neighborhoods*, AMO swam against the tide in certain respects, calling for increased state investment alongside its promotion of self-help initiatives. At the same time, AMO's urban voluntarism forms part of this wider seedbed in which neoliberal devolution blossomed.[83]

AMO's experiment in direct and participatory democracy drew the participation of an estimated 3,000 members between its assemblies, elections, and project committees—a scale of involvement all the more impressive considering that it operated outside official governmental structures. Through the community assembly and elected council, AMO sough to provide the neighborhood with a unified voice and convey the commitment of its residents to racial, cultural, and economic diversity. Dedicated to working through conflict—Josephine Butler once observed at a contentious meeting that "we don't agree on one damn thing, and we never did, except that we'll stay in this room and keep talking"—AMO's claim to represent the shared aspirations of area residents was more plausible than those of many community-based organizations.[84]

[83] Neumann, "Privatization, Devolution, and Jimmy Carter's National Urban Policy"; Sugrue, "Carter's Urban Policy Crisis"; Holtzman, *The Long Crisis*; Osman, ""We're Doing it Ourselves"."
[84] Bruning, "Early AMO Years"; Henig, *Gentrification in Adams Morgan*, 33-34.

AMO leadership and literature portrayed the divide in Adams Morgan as one between those who lived and worked in the neighborhood and predatory outside forces seeking to profit from or otherwise exploit the community. The reality, of course, was more complicated, as many white homeowners and businesspersons within the neighborhood's boundaries shared material interests with developers (or speculators, to borrow AMO's terminology) and supported their goals of increasing property values and recruiting upper middle-class clientele. Members of the Kalorama Citizen's Association and The Eighteenth and Columbia Road Business Association regularly challenged AMO's policy declarations, submitting their own testimonies in support of Perpetual's application and against the purchase of Community Park West. Revived by a new generation of Adams Morgan residents and small business owners in the mid-1970s, these longstanding forces of conservatism countered AMO's claim to speak for the area.[85]

Less easily dismissed, AMO co-founder Carlos Rosario also split with the group over the Shapiro tract, calling for its development as affordable housing for the area's growing Latinx community. Demonstrating the fragility of multiracial coalitions maintained through individual brokers, this divergence was further emblematic of Latinx residents' limited participation in AMO. While the group made some efforts to be bilingual and was briefly chaired by Pedro Luhan, an activist and entrepreneur who helped organize the Latino Festival, its rank and file remained dominated by English-speaking members and the relationships between Black and white residents often took precedent in the community assembly. Latinx residents gravitated instead towards Ayuda and other agencies as collective vehicles for expressing their concerns. [86]

[85] Henig, *Gentrification in Adams Morgan*, 45; George Frain to Tedson J. Meyers, March 26, 1974, Box 1, J. George Frain Papers; "Frain Testimony Draws AMO Council Ire," *The Columbian*, June 6, 1974.
[86] Carlos Rosario to Birch Bayh, May 29, 1974, Box 1, J. George Frain Papers; Benito Diaz, "Lujan Picked as New AMO Chairperson," *The Columbian*, August 22, 1974, Washingtoniana Periodicals Collection; Paula Diehl, "Ayuda's Services to Latinos Increase," *The Columbian*, March 31, 1975.

Further, AMO's persistent calls to preserve the area's racial and economic mix concealed a more troubling picture. Cast as a crossroads between different cultures, Adams Morgan could be more accurately characterized as a zone of microsegregation, in which substandard housing occupied by Black and Latinx tenants stood within yards of white-owned luxury dwellings. Far from abating it, gentrification only reconfigured this block-by-block geography. Not unaware of this dichotomy, AMO members wrestled with how to respond. Should they work to improve the surrounding environment, beautifying Adams Morgan's disinvested eastern and southern areas, or would that only facilitate the further incursion of the white middle class? Would pooling their money to help low-income tenants purchase their homes and operating a community real estate service to steer new homes to longtime residents help even the playing field? Ultimately, AMO realized it needed to move beyond the direct action of its project committees to make a sustained impact, working to change both citywide policy and the practices of financial institutions.[87]

AMO's speculation tax and Seaton Street campaigns called into question the perceived natural workings of the housing market, transforming property speculation and the displacement it precipitated into sites of political contestation. While the speculation tax as fully envisioned by the Task Force left many questions unanswered, its passage would have enabled vulnerable residents in rapidly gentrifying areas to gain a foothold, in essence affecting a moratorium on profit-driven redevelopment in the city. The tax as passed, however, did next to nothing—with its multiple loopholes and lax enforcement by city administrators only a handful of developers ever paid it, and the city council ultimately voted to repeal it in 1981. More ambivalent in its outcomes, the agreement AMO reached with Perpetual registers the contradictions that attended

[87] On microsegregation within statistically diverse urban communities, see Laura M. Tach, "Diversity, Inequality, and Microsegregation: Dynamics of Inclusion and Exclusion in a Racially and Economically Diverse Community," *Cityscape* 16, no. 4 (2014), 13-45. On the deployment of the language and ethos of diversity by the urban upper classes, see Sylvie Tissot, *Good Neighbors: Gentrifying Diversity in Boston's South End* (London: Verso, 2015).

demands for reinvestment in historically disinvested urban communities. On the one hand, the organization pried open access to capital that was desperately needed after decades of redlining, not only for the Seaton Street tenants but for the low-income home purchasers and limited-equity cooperatives that followed them across the District. On the other, renewed investment in urban areas could add fuel to the fire of displacement rather than dampen it, as the Perpetual Research Group amply documented. It could also provide cover to financial institutions in the process.[88]

The deal AMO struck with Perpetual marked a critical milestone in the evolution of community development strategies, helping to shape the Community Reinvestment Act in 1977 and serving as forerunner to the emergence of community benefits agreements two decades later. AMO's passage from protesters to problem fixers to powerbrokers was broadly consistent with that of neighborhood-based groups in other cities, many of which transformed into community development corporations (CDCs) in the 1970-80s—a tactical shift one scholar narrated as "off the barricades, into the boardrooms." Often born from crisis and built from the ground up by dedicated volunteers, CDCs came to comprise a key component of urban governance amidst the withdrawal of federal support from cities, producing affordable housing, providing services, and forming a conduit between disinvested neighborhoods and the financial sector. Most also backed away from their origins in protest, becoming increasingly professional and entrepreneurial. Even as they have preserved a foothold for many lower-income residents in cities, the market-based strategies embraced by CDCs often contributed to their overall gentrification through their emphases on mixed-income residential development and commercial revitalization. [89]

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[88] Wells, "Decent Place to Stay," 148-150. On the limits of federal community reinvestment policy and lending to affluent white urban homebuyers, see Marchiel, *After Redlining*, 156-191.

[89] William Fulton, "Off the Barricades, Into the Boardrooms," *Planning* 53, no. 8 (1987), 11-15. On the role of CDCs within urban governance see James DeFillipis, "Community Control and Development: The Long View," in James DeFillipis and Susan Saegert, eds., *The Community Development Reader* (London: Routledge, 2012), 30-37. On the early growth of CDCs and their activist origins, see Rabig, *The Fixers*, 173-236. On the role of CDCs within the gentrification of Harlem, see Goldstein, *Roots of Urban Renaissance*, 197-277.

Among the first groups to demonstrate and organize against gentrification in the US, AMO members also forged pathbreaking analyses of the process from its front lines. Through formulations such as 'reverse blockbusting,' AMO contended that urban land speculation and the displacement it led to was a process constituted by class *and* race. Drawing connections between the wave of evictions issued on Willard Street and the wider history of forced Black dispersal in the District, Walter Pierce illuminated how the profit motive intertwined with white prerogative in the production and reproduction of urban space. AMO organizers also astutely observed the role of progressive white subcultures within the cycle of neighborhood transition. Watching countercultural communes replace low-income Black and Latinx households on Lanier Place, Nahikian outlined in a 1972 article how white artists and activists ultimately cleared the way for the middle-class professionals that followed, many unaware or unwilling to confront how their relative privilege positioned them as accomplices within a process of dispossession. Learned through struggle, each of these interventions preceded their wider adoption within the urban studies literature on gentrification—at times by decades.[90]

Nahikian's perceptive analysis of the role of the counterculture within gentrification pointed to an uncomfortable truth, one she named at the 1975 Alliance gathering: young white activists new to the neighborhood comprised a considerable segment of AMO's base. Carrying out much of the work of its project committees, they also contributed to the offbeat atmosphere property speculators were all too happy to exploit. The organization's emergence, in this sense, was bound up with the displacement it sought to disrupt. Acknowledging this core contradiction,

[90] Valentine, "Inner-City Group Fights Investor"; Nahikian, "Blockbusters Manipulate Freaks". For an overview of the scholarship on gentrification and early structural and cultural explanations, see Loretta Lees, Tom Slater, and Elvin Wyly, *Gentrification* (London: Routledge, 2008) 39-128. On white entitlement, property, and the production of space, see Brenna Bhandar, *Colonial Lives of Property: Law, Land, and Racial Regimes of Ownership* (Durham: Duke, 2018); Aileen Moreton-Robinson, *The White Possessive: Property, Power, and Indigenous Sovereignty* (Minneapolis: Minnesota, 2015); and Nancy Mirabal, "Geographies of Displacement: Latina/os, Oral History, and The Politics of Gentrification in San Francisco's Mission District," *The Public Historian* 31, no. 2 (2009), 7-31.

however, needn't distract from what AMO accomplished—including coalescing a neighborhood coalition across the lines of race, class, and language that enabled it to confront economic forces larger than any one individual could take on alone. The persistence of the community assembly for a decade attests to the power of what they built.[91]

Limits of the Local: Adams Morgan and the End of the AMO Era

There from the beginning, Ed Jackson shouldered AMO in the early 1980s, acting as chairman alongside his ANC duties. With assemblies attracting only several dozen—and largely transformed to campaign stops for local political candidates—the decline of the organization as a powerful grassroots force had become apparent. Punctuating the perception that the old AMO era was over, Nahikian and Smith squared off in a bruising 1982 primary campaign for the Ward 1 council seat vacated by Clarke as part of his run for city council chairman. Nahikian contended that Smith's role in the Seaton Street project was overhyped and driven primarily by his political ambitions. Smith, elected to the school board several years earlier, accused Nahikian of lacking experience and cast himself as "a church man and a family man" whose lifestyle better aligned with Black voters. Each charged that the other had strayed from their organizing roots, accepting campaign contributions from bankers and developers. Smith won the contest, receiving 51% of the votes to Nahikian's 42%, and went on to win the general election. Challenged unsuccessfully by Pierce four years later, Smith served four terms on the council, where he earned a reputation as a moderate willing to partner with the private sector in pursuit of economic development. By 1986, the year its former chairs faced each other, AMO had effectively ceased to function.[92]

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[91] Alliance for Neighborhood Government, "Report on Proceedings," 4-5; Richards and Rowe, "Restoring the City," 60; Henig, *Gentrification in Adams Morgan*, 33.

[92] Henig, *Gentrification in Adams Morgan*, 34-35; Jube Shiver Jr., "Ward 1 Race Splits an Old Alliance," *The Washington Post,* July 21, 1982; Judith Valente, "The Council Races: Tenants' Votes are Seen as Vital to 2 Major Contenders in Ward 1," *The Washington Post,* September 1, 1982; Ed Bruske, "Frank Smith: New Councilman to Press for Tenant Rights, Tax Breaks for Elderly, Firms," *The Washington Post,* November 17, 1982; Judith Valente, "D.C. Election Board Certifies Primary Vote," *The Washington Post,* October 13, 1982; "The 1986 Election:

That same year, the *Post* ran a ten-year retrospective on AMO's battle for Seaton Street. While finding that eight of the nine families remained, the article also found that the block had largely gentrified all around them, a reality met with mixed reactions by the longtime residents, who welcomed rising property values and the promise of home equity yet had few interactions with their new neighbors. Seaton Street's modestly sized two story townhouses now sold for $150,000; larger homes just north in the Reed-Cooke district often went for twice that or more. The "Georgetownization" of Adams Morgan was well under way, like bohemian neighborhoods in other cities an emblem of the wider transformation to come. Unable to stem the tide in its own backyard, AMO did, however, contribute to the preservation of affordable housing across the city. Under DHCD's Tenant Purchase Program, directed by Nahikian and modeled after Seaton Street creative financing, over 3,000 rental units were converted to cooperative ownership, providing a bulwark that would only prove more important in the years that followed.[93]

Formed to advance neighborhood autonomy in a moment when the city lacked even the semblance of self-government, the Adams Morgan Organization created a collective assembly for direct and participatory decision-making that engaged thousands. Its project committees put forth an alternative vision of urban development premised on collective responsibility, human creativity, and ecological sustainability. Confronting the crisis of displacement wrought by the onset of gentrification, its campaigns conveyed critical lessons about both the power of organized persistence and the limits of local control and its pursuit.

District Primary Results," *The Washington Post,* September 10, 1986; Bill Ehart, "Politics of '60s Took Root in Adams Morgan," *The Washington Post,* May 28, 1984.

[93] Tom Precious, "Gentrification Comes to Seaton Street," *The Washington Post,* December 6, 1986; Tom Precious, "The Changing Look of Reed-Cooke," *The Washington Post,* March 8, 1986; Nahikian, interview by Meghelli, July 21, 2017; Huron, "Creating a Commons in the Capital," 60; Asch and Musgrove, "We are Headed for Some Bad Trouble," 120. On the larger history of limited-equity cooperatives in Washington and how attending to them challenges capitalocentric theorizations of the city, see Huron, *Carving out the Commons*.

Chapter 4

"We Cannot Live with the Administration Saying it has No Responsibility": The Community for Creative Non-Violence and the Battle for Shelter Against Austerity

> Millions of us are homeless. That is the State of the Union.
>
> Millions of us are out of work, and out of hope, out of choices. That is the State of the Union.
>
> Millions of Americans are groaning under the weight of economic adversity. That is the State of the Union.
>
> Mr. President, it does not matter how smoothly you deliver your speech tonight. It does not matter if you try to reassure us. It does not matter if you try to minimize the seriousness of our national situation or try to trivialize the pain our people are feeling.
>
> It does not matter, for we know the truth.
>
> We know in the marrow of our bones that the State of the Union is a disaster.[1]

The crowd started to gather early in the afternoon. Convened by the Community for Creative Non-Violence (CCNV), representatives of civil rights, labor, religious, and peace organizations had come to the Capitol Rotunda to offer their own assessment of the country's condition in advance of the 1983 State of the Union. In stark contrast to President Reagan's buoyant claim that "America is on the mend," the 300 protesters evoked "a nation racked by pain and suffering" as a result of the administration's policies. With unemployment at its highest rate since the Great Depression—the national level stood at nearly 11%, a percentage that doubled when counting African Americans alone—Reagan's decision to double down on domestic spending cuts left "millions of men, women, and children forced to eat out of trash bins…[and] seek shelter in cardboard boxes." It was time, the ad hoc coalition contended, to reverse course by declaring a national state of emergency and inaugurating robust domestic programs to provide food, shelter,

[1] Community for Creative Non-Violence, "The People's State of the Union Address," January 25, 1983, Box 4, Carol Fennelly Papers, Special Collections Research Center, George Washington University.

and jobs. As a first start, they argued, federal buildings should be made available for use as emergency shelters during the winter and all surplus food released from federal storehouses for consumption. Refusing to leave their seated positions until action was taken, 162 were arrested, forcibly removed from the Rotunda, and charged with unlawful assembly.[2]

CCNV's Rotunda campaign had begun several months earlier, when in November the group sent letters to all members of Congress urging them to provide "an example of leadership and creativity that shakes us out of our complacency" by allowing use of the highly symbolic space as an emergency overnight shelter for the city's unhoused residents. Rebuffed in their request, the group's appeal was not entirely without precedent. Only five years earlier, it had brokered a tentative agreement with the Department of the Interior to shelter a segment of Washington's swelling homeless population within the National Visitor's Center, a remnant from the Bicentennial that occupied part of Union Station. While the arrangement only lasted ten days before they were forced to leave, the Visitor's Center action accomplished its chief task: raising the profile of homelessness as an issue of national urgency and concern. The civil disobedience at the Rotunda yielded results as well. Several weeks later, HUD secretary Samuel Pierce sent a memo to regional administrators urging them to make temporary shelter available to the homeless for management by local governments or charitable organizations, working with other federal agencies to determine which structures were available and eligible for repurposing.[3]

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[2] "Contact List for Rotunda Action," January 1983, Box 4, Carol Fennelly Papers; Alfred E. Lewis, "162 Arrested in the Capitol In Protest for Food, Shelter," *The Washington Post*, January 26, 1983; Ronald Reagan, State of the Union Address, January 25, 1983, Ronald Reagan Presidential Foundation and Institute, https://www.reaganfoundation .org/media/128570/state-of-the-union.pdf (accessed November 15, 2022); Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, "Falling Behind: A Report on How Blacks Have Fared Under Reagan," *Journal of Black Studies* 17, no. 2 (1986), 156.

[3] Carol Fennelly and Mitch Snyder to Members of Congress, November 24, 1982, Box 4, Carol Fennelly Papers; Paul W. Valentine, "Homeless Move into Visitor Center," *The Washington Post*, December 1, 1978; James Lardner and Paul W. Valentine, "32 Are Arrested in Protests at Visitor Center," *The Washington Post*, December 11, 1978; Colman McCarthy, "The Government's Go-Slow Shelter Program," *The Washington Post*, April 23, 1983.

Formed in 1970 on the campus of George Washington University as part of the antiwar groundswell, CCNV turned its attention to the growing war at home over the following decade. The community, led initially by Paulist priest Ed Guinan, drew on the dissident traditions of the Catholic Worker and Catonsville Nine, a strand of countercultural Christian activism premised on integrating contemplation, service, and resistance. Founding a network of soup kitchens and hospitality houses, the group's efforts to stem the rising tide of homelessness led eventually to the halls of power and confrontations with the President. A second generation of leadership centered around the charismatic and controversial Mitch Snyder forced the administration to reckon with the human cost of its austerity policy through a combination of media-savvy street theater and militant intransigency, helping to forge a national network of homelessness advocates in the process. Utilizing the surplus government building program their Rotunda action helped to create, CCNV embarked on its largest mission later that same year, fighting to establish a model emergency shelter a mere half a mile from the Capitol.[4]

CCNV's rise to prominence registered the complex shifts in racial and urban governance taking place within the period. A persistent thorn in the side of the Reagan administration, the predominantly white activist group maintained a complex yet often contested relationship with the Barry administration, protesting its shelter policies one moment and partnering with the city to provide services the next. The seemingly inexorable climb of homelessness in the District—which both claimed an ever-greater share of the budget and threatened the politics of private growth Barry embraced to address shrinking revenues and fund public services—placed the

[4] Victoria Rader, *Signal Through the Flames: Mitch Snyder and America's Homeless* (Kansas City: Sheed & Ward, 1986), 49-60; on the Catholic Worker, see Anne Klejment and Nancy L. Roberts, eds. *American Catholic Pacifism: The Influence of Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker Movement* (Westport: Praeger, 1996); on the Berrigan brothers and Catholic protest in the Vietnam era, see Murray Polner and Jim O'Grady, *Disarmed and Dangerous: The Radical lives and Times of Daniel and Philip Berrigan* (London: Routledge, 1997).

unhoused and their supporters on a collision course with the mayor soon into his tenure. The implementation of austerity at the federal level further hemmed in the difficult choices available to reform-oriented leaders such as Barry due to decades of disinvestment and white residential flight, increasing the number of people in need across the decade while linking the city's fate to boom and bust cycles of downtown development. Challenging the local government's tepid response to the growing number of people on the streets, CCNV also helped to pick up the slack, running city-owned shelters on an all-volunteer basis. In so doing, the group of mostly white radicals also contributed to the wider turn towards the nonprofit sector and privatized social service provision, a transformation with racialized consequences for the city and beyond.

This chapter assesses the Community for Creative Non-Violence and its campaigns to create a caring city and society in an era of crisis further exacerbated by state devolution. First focused on its own response to homelessness and that of other faith-related organizations, by the late 1970s CCNV developed an analysis of the structural factors that produced extreme precarity, including the cuts to social services it cast as "policies that kill." Forcing the federal and local government to act through direct action tactics such as protest encampments, hunger strikes, and public funerals for those who died from exposure, the group won repeat concessions from the Reagan and Barry administrations, each of which were reluctant to claim responsibility for their most vulnerable citizens. While pressing the federal government to finance its model emergency shelter, CCNV worked simultaneously to cement a legal right to shelter within the city, which it accomplished through the passage of Initiative 17 in 1984. Eventually wresting the funds for the shelter's completion, CCNV also helped secure the passage of the McKinney-Vento Act, a bill which provided federal backing for shelters and other programs that served the homeless. Their efforts to expand affordable housing production through the Housing Now! coalition were less

successful, signaling the ambiguous nature of their earlier achievements and the increasing tensions between the homeless and those who advocated on their behalf. Running a sprawling shelter for 1,400 people with few supports and facing the repeal of the legal right to shelter, CCNV suffered devastating losses and declined organizationally in the 1990s. Dedicated to combatting state abandonment, CCNV's mutual aid practices were also intertwined with its unfolding; at the same time, their activism laid the groundwork for Housing First policies and reflected their belief that housing is a fundamental human right whose denial is indefensible.

"One Needn't Visit Vietnam to Witness the Violence of Wasted Lives": The Origins of CCNV

As relayed in the second chapter, Washington formed a hub for antiwar activity by the 1970s, with multiple New Left groups taking up residence in the capital in order to organize campaigns and coordinate mass demonstrations. For some who came to the city the struggle was not only political or cultural but also profoundly spiritual. Following King's diagnosis in his "Beyond Vietnam" speech, these religiously inflected radicals saw the war as a symptom of a morally sick society organized around the pursuit of profit rather than human need. Many also hoped to model the revolution in values he called for 'in the heart of the empire,' reinterpreting Christian traditions in line with countercultural impulses through forming communal households dedicated to simplicity and solidarity. Such groups, which included the Community for Creative Non-Violence, Sojourners, and others, envisioned resistance to war as a spiritually rooted way of life. As the war in Vietnam trudged towards its ignominious end, DC's religious activists turned their energies increasingly towards the structural violence in their own backyards and its manifestation in rising rates of hunger and homelessness in the city across the 1970s.[5]

[5] Martin Luther King, Jr., "A Time to Break the Silence," in James Melvin Washington, ed. *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (New York: Harper, 1986), 231-244; on religious elements within the New Left, see Doug Rossinow, *The Politics of Authenticity: Liberalism, Christianity, and the New Left in America* (New York: Columbia).

A financial planner, Ed Guinan left behind a lucrative career to pursue the priesthood in 1964, joining the Paulist order. Swept up in the small but prominent circle of Catholic protest, and inspired by Thich Nhat Hanh's vision of engaged Buddhism, Guinan immersed himself in activism while serving as a chaplain at George Washington University, supporting McCarthy's run for the Democratic presidential nomination on an antiwar platform and providing counseling to conscientious objectors. Instead of entering a parish or becoming a professor, the typical paths available to priests, he received the order's support to start an experimental community alongside others on campus. Founded by a group of six in 1970, CCNV's collective work centered initially on the running of a peace resource center. Members collected and distributed antiwar materials; they also organized seminars exploring nonviolence, including its philosophical and theological origins and how it has been taken up historically as a tool for social change. By the following year, the group had become a fixture on the city's antiwar scene, leading civil disobedience and tax resistance workshops and helping with local coordination related to the May Day actions.[6]

Sitting in jail for protests related to US actions in Southeast Asia, Guinan grew troubled by his and the group's general disconnect from the realities of DC. Nestled in Foggy Bottom, the all-white group remained ensconced in privilege while much of the city suffered. Addressing the inconsistency between its radical rhetoric and daily actions, CCNV opened Zacchaeus Kitchen downtown in the fall of 1972, naming the soup kitchen after the Roman tax collector in Luke's Gospel who repented and gave his possessions to the poor. Quickly scaling up to feed 150 or more people per day, members pleaded for excess food from stores, wholesalers, and churches to keep the program running. As the number of core community members expanded, growing in four years to forty people across six houses, so too did CCNV's initiatives. Taking over houses

[6] Jack Mann, "Good People," *The Washington Post*, December 23, 1973; Rader, *Signal Through the Flames*, 49-57; Edward Guinan, ed. *Peace and Nonviolence: Basic Writings* (New York: Paulist, 1973).

on N Street owned by Luther Place Church for a nominal rent, the group opened a free health clinic, a small residential shelter, and a pretrial house that provided a stable address and legal support for those entangled with the criminal justice system.[7]

As Guinan pivoted towards service, others in the community resolved to maintain focus on the war and hastening its end. Chief among them was Mitch Snyder, who moved to the city initially to help open the pretrial house. Formerly incarcerated himself, Snyder had served three years in federal prison for driving a stolen car across state lines. The arrest came while Snyder was on the road, having left his wife, two kids, and a job on Wall Street amidst what he would later cast as a personal crisis. It was while imprisoned in Danbury, Connecticut that Snyder met Daniel and Phil Berrigan, an encounter that reoriented his life. Convicted of destroying US property and interfering with the Selective Service Act for their role in the Catonsville Nine action, in which they raided a draft board office and set fire to draft files with homemade napalm alongside seven others, the priests took Snyder under their wing and provided a channel for his unrest and anger. Raised Jewish, Snyder converted to Catholicism, taking in the Bible and liberation theology alongside Gandhi. Soon he was participating in targeted fasts and coordinating prison strikes, protesting both prison conditions and the use of prisoner labor to support the war effort. Initially denied parole due to such campaigns, Snyder was released in May 1972 and briefly organized with Prisoner's Strike for Peace in New York before heading to DC to join CCNV. By the following summer Snyder was at the center of the action, organizing five weeks of illegal "pray ins" at the White House in protest of the ongoing war.[8]

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[7] Community for Creative Non-Violence, "Program Brochure," 1976, Box 1, Mary Ellen Hombs Papers, Special Collections Research Center, George Washington University; Juan Williams, "Antiwar Unit of '60s Helps Poor in '70s," *The Washington Post*, September 20, 1976; Rader, *Signal Through the Flames*, 57-63.

[8] Prisoners Strike for Peace, "Prisoners Strike for Peace Notes," March 1973, Box 5, Mitch Snyder Papers, Special Collections Research Center, George Washington University; Mitch Snyder and John Bach, "Anatomy of a Strike," 1972, Box 5, Snyder Papers; Megan Rosenfeld, "60 War Protesters Arrested, Total is 158," *The Washington Post*, August 15, 1973; Rader, *Signal Through the Flames*, 41-48.

Disagreement over whether to prioritize service or protest soon evolved into personal conflict. While Guinan and Snyder had different temperaments—the former was as steadfast as the latter was mercurial—each were charismatic leaders sure of themselves and their sense of direction. In 1974, the group decided to open a new house on Euclid Street in Columbia Heights as an alternative to splitting up. Within a few years, they were joined in the neighborhood by Sojourners, an intentional Christian community that published *Post-American* magazine and had recently relocated to the city from Chicago. Both CCNV and Sojourners were deeply inspired by the civil rights movement, the critical role the Black church played within it, and the non-violent philosophy of King. Their organizational cultures and ideological hallmarks, though, were more reflective of their respective religious roots in working-class immigrant Catholicism and the rejection of suburban white evangelicalism. While their organizing and service initiatives engaged the broader Black neighborhood, each group's internal composition remained largely white, demonstrating how religious segregation was easier to critique than it was to dismantle. It further conveyed how white activists' emphases on voluntary simplicity and acts of solidarity—and the often unarticulated racial and economic privileges that underwrote such commitments—sat uneasily alongside Black demands for equitable redistribution and self-determination.[9]

Soon after opening Euclid House effectively became a second headquarters. Focused on organizing, direct action, and awareness building, it was led by Snyder and Mary Ellen Hombs. Having joined the group in its early days while a student at GWU, Hombs was instrumental to the creation of its service programs and a trusted leader despite being only in her early twenties. She was also a talented writer and researcher, taking the lead on its educational materials and

[9] On Sojourners, the broader (if small) evangelical left, and questions of race, see David R. Swartz, *Moral Minority: The Evangelical Left in an Age of Conservatism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012): 187-212; also Brantley W. Gasaway, *Progressive Evangelicals and the Pursuit of Social Justice* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014): 75-100.

fundraising letters. Initial Euclid House campaigns focused on supporting draft resisters refusing conditional clemency and raising funds for famine relief in the Sahel. To support themselves while maintaining flexibility over their schedule, house members started a painting company. Proceeds went directly to communal expenses, with each member receiving a small personal stipend, an expression of their commitment to simplicity and refusal to pay federal income tax.[10]

With the fall of Saigon in April 1975, Euclid House debated its next steps. Jumping into issues after issue following Snyder's impulses, a small group study of Gandhi's writings helped the group refocus its energies. Their discussions turned to the satyagraha teacher's concept of the constructive program, which he described as the counterpart to nonviolent resistance. In essence, it involved the creation of prefigurative institutions as alternatives to present systems. A process the Wobblies and later the Catholic Worker referred to as "creating the new society within the shell of the old," the notion of constructive programs resonated with the group's Christian anarchist politics even as it was somewhat difficult to distinguish from the service-oriented approach they had only recently demurred. Inherently participatory, such programs were also necessarily local in nature, and as the discussion evolved their attention turned closer to home.[11]

As members explored what it might mean to put these ideas into action, the eviction wave AMO was fighting just a few miles away begin to reach east of 16th Steet into Columbia Heights. Seeing families being cast out on the street even as homes on the same block stood abandoned, the group began to research the city's housing crisis and how they might respond constructively.

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[10] Rick Janisch and Robin J. Stein, "Pacifist Fights to Get Help for Homeless," *The Washington Post*, January 8, 1981; March First Coalition, "White House Demonstration Flyer," Box 4, Carol Fennelly Papers; Rader, *Signal Through the Flames*, 65-66.

[11] Rader, *Signal Through the Flames*, 67-69; Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, *Constructive Programme: Its Meaning and Place* (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Trust, 1945). For an anarchist-inflected introduction to prefigurative politics, see Paul Raekstad and Sofia Saio Gradin, *Prefigurative Politics: Building Tomorrow Today* (New York: Wiley, 2020); for a Marxist critique see Samuel Farber, "Reflections on "Prefigurative Politics"," *International Socialist Review* 92 (Spring 2014). For an account of a New Left organization central to the concept's evolution, see Andrew Cornell, *Oppose and Propose! Lessons From Movement for A New Society* (Oakland: AK Press, 2011).

In looking into the neighborhood's abandoned houses they learned that the majority were owned by the city through the RLA. Discussions soon turned towards approaching the city about taking over an abandoned property and transforming it into an emergency shelter for evicted families. The team also identified what they thought would be a suitable property: 1361 Fairmont Street NW, a sizeable 38 room building just one block north of their house. Hoping to challenge the private property model—and recognizing that they had no funds to purchase the property from RLA at fair market value—the group proposed the creation of a community land trust. The first time this new form of tenure was attempted in an urban center, the campaign led to the formation of the Columbia Heights Community Ownership Project (CHCOP). Jointly led by Hombs, then earning a master's degree in urban planning nearby at Howard, and Perk Perkins, a member of Sojourners and the director of its housing ministry, CHCOP worked on advancing the Fairmont project while identifying threatened apartment buildings for potential inclusion in the trust.[12]

CCNV met with DCHD officials in June 1976, who were understandably dubious about the group's financial and technical capacity to renovate the dilapidated Fairmont property. The Black appointees from the Washington administration were further skeptical of the white activist group and its claim to represent the interests of the urban poor. The city turned down the request. At this point used to encountering opposition, CCNV was undeterred, and launched a petition and held community meetings on the project. They also announced their intention to illegally occupy the house and commence renovations, doing so in August before a crowd of supporters and media, leading to five arrests. Court appearances afforded the group further opportunities to press their case—as well as put city officials on the spot. Restarting negotiations, further delays

[12] Williams, "Antiwar Unit of '60s"; Mark Lee, "Birth of a Land Trust," *Sojourners*, March 1977, 15-16; Blair Gately, "A Way to Battle the 'Speculators' in Columbia Heights," *The Washington Post*, August 28, 1978; Bill Black, "Land Trusts Help Poor People Buy, Keep Homes," *The Washington Post*, August 6, 1983; Columbia Heights Community Ownership Project, "The First Year brochure," 1977, Box 2, Hombs Papers.

led CCNV to issue a press release stating members would stay in cardboard boxes outside the District Building until a resolution was reached if they did not receive a response within three weeks. Relenting, the city granted the group a two-year occupancy permit in March 1977. While problems with the lease remained, such as a clause mandating written consent for any alterations, CCNV was confident the legal issues could be worked out. They began repairs immediately.[13]

While CCNV was forced to wait, the weather did not. The winter of 1977 was especially harsh for the city's homeless, leading to seven deaths from exposure. Already hosting thirty-five overnight on the ground floor of the Euclid House, CCNV and Sojourners put out an urgent call in January, sending letters to 1100 area faith communities asking them to consider opening their doors on cold nights and promising to provide volunteers. One responded: Luther Place Church. Continuing through March, the program expanded to include a second church, St. Stephen and the Incarnation Episcopal Church, the following winter. Leadership for the program came from several new members, each of whom moved swiftly to the center of community life. Relocating from California to explore joining Sojourners, Carol Fennelly gravitated instead towards CCNV. Before long she was drumming up press and navigating the halls of Congress. Fennelly also became Snyder's romantic and organizational partner, counterbalancing his at times overbearing demeanor. Lin Romano began volunteering with the group while a University of Maryland student, ultimately leaving school to join the community full-time and help staff the women's shelter. Joining them in providing hospitality, Harold Moss found his way to CCNV through work with CHCOP. The lone African American among the core leadership, Moss felt called to leave his well-paying job as a chemist at the National Institutes of Health in order to serve those

[13] Juan Williams, "5 Arrested After Group Enters House," *The Washington Post*, August 13, 1975; Colman McCarthy, "Empty Houses and the Homeless Poor," *The Washington Post*, December 8, 1976; "Abandoned Home Fight Won by Shelter Group," *The Washington Post*, January 7, 1977; Rader, *Signal Through the Flames*, 71-81.

on society's margins, a decision that distanced him from his wife and family. Alongside Snyder and Hombs, Fennelly, Romano, and Moss formed the backbone of Euclid House and CCNV's second generation.[14]

By 1978, work on 1361 Fairmont had grown to a halt. While securing pro bono services and thousands of hours of donated labor, the money the group had saved up from painting gigs was long gone and the price tag of repairs continued to balloon. They had also made mistakes, damaging a load bearing wall and causing the roof to cave in, a development which led the city to issue a stop work order. In April DHCD terminated the lease, and it seemed the group's dream of a family shelter on Fairmont was fading. Then Snyder sensed an opportunity, tipped off by the left-leaning *Post* columnist Colman McCarthy. Holy Trinity Catholic Church, a Jesuit parish linked to Georgetown University with a reputation for social concern, had embarked on a half-million-dollar renovation campaign. Questioning the necessity of upgrading a sanctuary when people lacked shelter, the group sent an open letter requesting $80,000 be redirected instead to the Fairmont project. Turned down by the priest and parish council, members spent the summer standing through services before initiating a fast and occupying the church courtyard. Coverage in the *Post*, driven by McCarthy, highlighted the controversy and the theological and ethical questions it raised. Church members felt unfairly targeted, or at the very least used by CCNV to make some larger point. Smaller individual donations did little to sway the group's resolve.[15]

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[14] John F. Steinbruck, "Invitation to Refuge Night Hospitality Program," September 29, 1977, Box 18, Fennelly Papers; Colman McCarthy, "Night Hospitality," *The Washington Post*, December 21, 1977; Ed Bruske, "A Cause She's Willing to Die For," *The Washington Post*, November 5, 1988; Hollie I. West, "Three Samaritans," *The Washington Post*, December 21, 1980; Patricia Camp, "Group Occupies Apartment in Housing Protest," *The Washington Post*, September 16, 1978; Rader, *Signal Through the Flames*, 76.

[15] Community of Creative Non-Violence to James English and Holy Trinity Catholic Church, July 4, 1978, Box 1, Hombs Papers; Marjorie Hyer, "One Man's Battle to Build a shelter for the Homeless," *The Washington Post*, June 2, 1978; Kathleen G. Rhodes, "Sit-In Protests Church Renovation," *The Washington Post*, September 7, 1978; Colman McCarthy, "A Bitter Church Conflict on Help to the Poor," *The Washington Post*, August 20, 1978; Rader, *Signal Through the Flames*, 88-94.

Then in September—the day after Walter Washington lost the mayoral primary to Marion Barry and both he and his DCHD director were on their way out—CCNV members awoke to find the Fairmont property being smashed by a wrecking ball. Efforts to thwart the demolition by occupying the building were unsuccessful, leading only to arrests. The group felt angry and betrayed, with Hombs writing in a letter to the editor that the surprise demolition "represents a smashing of hopes for a shelter for some of the 2,300 families placed on the streets each year." More quietly they were also relieved and ready to move on. Logically, the end of the Fairmont project would have also triggered an end to the Holy Trinity campaign: with no building left to repair, what objectives were they trying to achieve by targeting the church? Snyder, however, did not see it that way, convinced there were weightier spiritual matters at stake. When the parish decided to move forward with the renovation as planned and not reallocate any funds to housing needs, Snyder announced that he would go on a total fast starting on Christmas Eve. Reorienting the church's priorities towards the poor, he contended, was worth the risk of death.[16]

While presenting as a united front, behind the scenes CCNV was divided over Snyder's fast, debating both its ethical means and strategic ends. Mentors such as the Berrigans cast it as a fool's errand, and one that could cost Snyder his life. As his body grew weaker, talks opened up between CCNV members and concerned parishioners. A number came to pray with Snyder and urged him to end the fast, including the archbishop. With the *Post* running photos of a visibly gaunt thirty-five year old man who was healthy just days ago, columnists and readers argued over how to interpret what they saw. Was Mitch a modern-day saint or an emotional terrorist? Was he driven by a desire for media attention, madness, or spiritual conviction? On the eighth

[16] Mary Ellen Hombs, "Destruction on Fairmont Street," *The Washington Post*, September 23, 1978; Paul W. Valentine, "Hunger Strike Against Church," *The Washington Post*, December 24, 1978; Rader, *Signal Through the Flames*, 82-83.

day, Snyder narrowly avoided being committed, evading the police who had come to intern him by escaping out a third-floor window and moving to an undisclosed location. Two days later, Snyder's doctor held a press conference announcing he was approaching kidney failure; that night he received last rites. Meanwhile, a crowd of forty stood outside Holy Trinity while the parish council met inside. At two in the morning, the priest announced that they would not cooperate with CCNV's demand and amend the budget. Stunned, and with time running out, the small team Snyder had appointed to make decisions on his behalf rushed him to the hospital.[17]

The fallout from the fast was extensive, both within the community and its public image. Emotionally traumatized from watching Snyder deteriorate, exhausted from trying to keep the shelters staffed, and angry that their voices didn't seem to matter, multiple members left. Long running tensions between Euclid House and the N street branch centered around Guinan spilled out into the open, leading them to part ways. The group lost many of its supporters, winnowing the ranks of those who joined in its campaigns, defended it in the press, and gave financially to keep its programs going. Describing the fast in its editorial page as "attempt at extortion" and "act of supreme arrogance and self-indulgence," the *Post* largely neglected the group for the next two years. Offering his side of the story in the *Star*, Snyder wrote that the campaign grew from "a serious attempt to follow what Gandhi called that 'small inner voice,' the voice of conscience and of God within us…however haltingly or imperfectly." Many were not convinced.[18]

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[17] Richard Cohen, "Exploring the Purpose Behind a Dying Man," *The Washington Post*, December 31, 1978; Michael Novak, "Violence and the Jim Jones of Washington," *The Washington Star*, January 7, 1979; Judy Mann, "Snyder's Fast Shows Who Values Life Most," *The Washington Post*, January 5, 1979; Paul W. Valentine, "Snyder Ends His Death Fast," *The Washington Post*, January 5, 1979; Duncan Spencer, "Activist Said to Be Near Death but Conscious," *The Washington Post*, January 4, 1979.

[18] Rader, *Signal Through the Flames*, 82-83.108-109; Editorial, "The Act of Mitch Snyder," *The Washington Post*, January 5, 1979; Mitch Snyder, "Mitch Snyder's Side of the Story," *The Washington Star*, January 21, 1979; Mary Fay Bourgoin, "Liberals Romance with CCNV on the Rocks," *National Catholic Reporter*, March 9, 1979.

Snyder's hunger strike pointed to a recurring tension within CCNV and its approach to activism: were their campaigns primarily concerned with the pursuit of spiritual truth on the part of their participants or the achievement of a specific social justice objective? In refocusing media and community attention on his body—and the lack of a clear campaign objective following the demolition of the Fairmont property—the Holy Trinity fast seemed to reflect the former. As such it risked further exploiting "the poor," only this time as part of an individual quest for meaning rather than in the pursuit of material gain. More generally, Snyder's crusades could obscure the agency of the homeless themselves.

The Holy Trinity campaign was not the last time CCNV took on the church. The following year small groups occupied both the Washington Cathedral and St. Matthew's Cathedral in an effort to get them to open their doors, throwing their own blood on the altar with the hopes of shocking the church into action. By this point their relationship with Luther Place Church, one of the few mainline churches willing to work with the group to provide shelter, had fallen apart due to CCNV's occupation past the agreed upon date and refusal to pay utility bills they agreed to cover. Its pastor, John Steinbruck, soon emerged as one of the group's strongest critics. Increasingly, though, the activists turned their prophetic criticism on a different target: the state. Bolstering their spiritual presuppositions with structural analyses, they began to consider how homelessness was produced, what it would take to respond to the crisis at scale, and the political and economic transformations necessary to end it.[19]

"Place the Blame Where it Belongs": Compelling State Responses to Homelessness

[19] "7 Persons Arrested Disrupting Services," *The Washington Post*, March 3, 1980; "Activist is Sentenced in Cathedral Incident," *The Washington Star*, September 10, 1980; John F. Steinbruck to Lin Romano, March 20, 1980, Box 1, Hombs Papers; Judith Rosenfeld, "John Steinbruck: The Shepherd in Combat," The Washington Post Magazine, December 15, 1985.

As the 1970s drew to a close there was little denying that the ranks of the unhoused were expanding across US urban centers. Not only were there more people living on the streets than at any time since the Great Depression, they also broke with the Skid Row stereotypes propagated by sociological literature and popular depiction. These "new homeless" included a significant proportion of people of color, women, and younger people; at least a quarter were categorized as having a severe mental illness. Yet while the spectacle of people sleeping in cardboard boxes and crowding under freeways was impossible to ignore, there was no consensus on what factors led to homelessness, the scope of the problem, or who bore responsibility for addressing it. Together with other advocates such as the New York-based National Coalition for the Homeless, CCNV fought to transform the prevailing narrative on homelessness from one of individual pathology to systemic abandonment. Conducting the first national survey of shelter providers, its campaigns dramatized the cost of continued government inaction on both the local and federal levels. At the same time, the growing presence of these providers in cities signaled the expanding privatization of social services. [20]

When CCNV and Sojourners began their night hospitality program, the city's only other provider of overnight shelter were two Social Gospel era missions where participants listened to sermons in exchange for a cot and a meal. Despite these religious strictures, their 200 beds filled up early on winter nights, leaving many turned away in the cold. There were no shelters at all for women (or the gender nonconforming). With no barriers to entry and active outreach, CCNV and Sojourners' church-based shelters quickly grew overcrowded. Receiving coverage in the *Post*—and threatening to hold a death watch vigil at the District Building—CCNV initiated talks with

[20] On the "new homeless" as a discursive category, see Todd DePastino, *Citizen Hobo: How A Century of Homelessness Shaped America* (Chicago: Chicago, 2003), 252-262; on the continuities between the "new homeless" of the 1970-80s and the skid row era, see Kenneth L. Kusmer, *Down & Out, on the Road: The Homeless in American history* (Oxford: Oxford, 2002), 239-247.

the city urging them to open a shelter, which the Washington administration reluctantly did in January 1978, moving within a month from a smaller facility to the former Blair School. The conditions at the city-run shelter were far from hospitable, though. Forced to strip and take showers, provide identification and income verification, and face down intimidation and even beatings from security guards, many preferred to take their chances on the streets instead.[21]

As the following winter approached, CCNV began to look for ways to elevate the issue of homelessness within the national consciousness while spurring change in city shelter policies. Reading an article about the National Visitors Center, a barely used Bicentennial exhibit in Union Station that Congress was contemplating closing, Snyder had an idea: what if we turn it into a shelter? A central and symbolic location with the potential for spectacle, the hall provided space for hundreds, meeting a practical need as well. Managed by the Department of the Interior (DOI), converting the Visitors Center into a shelter would draw the federal government into the question of homelessness for the first time. CCNV could also contrast its own shelter practices with those of the city by proving good meals and few requirements. The group sent a letter to the agency announcing their plans; remarkably, officials responded in an off-the-books meeting that while they could not sanction the takeover, neither would they prevent it from happening.[22]

With television cameras and newspaper reporters in tow, a group of two hundred entered the train hall to begin the occupation on November 30th at 10pm. Carried nationwide, the action drew an enthusiastic response, with both letters to the editor and donations pouring in. The city's

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[21] Community for Creative Non-Violence and Sojourners Fellowship, "Community Groups Win Battle With City Press Release," February 8, 1978, Box 2, Hombs Papers; Constance D'au Vin, "Churches Tackle Job of Sheltering Roving Homeless Overnight," *The Washington Post*, December 23, 1977; Constance D'au Vin, "DHR Opens New Shelter for Homeless, *The Washington Post*, February 10, 1978; Editorial, "Night Shelter for the Homeless," *The Washington Post*, January 29, 1978; Neil Henry, "In D.C., Raw and Threatening Things," *The Washington Post*, May 4, 1980.

[22] Community for Creative Non-Violence, "Outreach Letter," November 24, 1978; Box 1, Hombs Papers; Valentine, "Homeless Move into Visitor Center"; Curtis Austin, "Visitors Center Proposed as Hostel for the Homeless," *Washington Afro-American*, December 2, 1978; Rader, *Signal Through the Flames*, 112-117.

homeless, though, were less enthused; nightly attendance ranged in the low hundreds rather than the massive showing Snyder hoped for. Whether concerned about the potential for arrest, wary of the cameras, or refusing to serve as a political symbol, many stayed away. Fifty-degree weather in December may have also played a factor. By the end of the first week, officials' tolerance for the occupation had waned, with complaints about sanitary conditions and nuisances for travelers. After CCNV and its guests packed up and left on the morning of the tenth day, DOI padlocked the doors. For the next several days the group showed up anyways, camping out in front of the hall and refusing to cooperate when threatened with arrest. 42 were taken into custody; Snyder spent time in the hospital after being thrown down a flight of stairs by police. While describing the whole thing as a stunt, the drama the action provided was too good for the press to ignore.[23]

Securing the national spotlight on homelessness the group sought, the Visitors Center occupation also forced the city's hand. Ceding to CCNV's demands, Washington administration officials announced that they would open a women's shelter and overflow men's shelter while relaxing entry requirements. With Barry entering office several weeks later, the group had high hopes that the new mayor would be a willing partner on expanding services for the homeless, forgoing the previous pattern of antagonism. Not only was Barry a former activist himself, the city's white leftists and liberals formed a critical component of his successful electoral coalition alongside young Black professionals and low-income residents. In February, the mayor declared his support for a system of decentralized shelters, which would replace the city-run facilities with smaller shelters staffed by churches and community groups. Declaring "shelter is a basic human

[23] Valentine, "Homeless Move into Visitor Center"; Paul W. Valentine, "U.S. Officials Impatient with Live-In at Center," *The Washington Post*, December 5, 1978; Paul W. Valentine, "'Street People' Locked Out of Visitor Center by U.S.," *The Washington Post*, December 10, 1978; "Temporary Shelter for Indigents in Capital is Shut," The *New York Times*, December 10, 1978; Editorial, "Help for the Homeless," *The Washington Post*, December 9, 1978.

right" at the press conference, Barry also announced the formation of a 27-member Advisory Commission on Homelessness. For CCNV, who had agreed to staff the shelters through the winter on a volunteer basis, it was an exciting step forward.[24]

The warm relationship did not last long. The food furnished by the city was inadequate; the former school serving as a shelter quickly grew dangerously overcrowded. After six weeks, CCNV turned over operations to resident leaders and Commission volunteers, an arrangement that quickly fell apart. Casting the experiment as a failure, the city again took over management of the shelter. Later that spring the city announced that the women's shelter would be closed, with the building demolished to make way for new construction. Leaving forty women with nowhere to go, a team of women from CCNV opened a house on M Street. After the *Post* ran a sensational article on the house's poor conditions, city inspectors demanded its closure, a fate that was avoided only after the women barricaded themselves inside and Barry called off the eviction. When the city downplayed the extent of the problem, CCNV organized public funeral processions through the streets for those who died from exposure, with shelter residents carrying banners inscribed with the mayor's own words on preventing needless deaths.[25]

Elected on a reform agenda, Barry inherited a city in dire financial shape, the full extent of which would only be revealed after an exhaustive two-year audit. Facing a projected annual deficit of $170 million, and with the city's ability to borrow hampered by Congressional control,

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[24] Paul W. Valentine, "Group Submits Formal Demand for 'Street People' Shelters," *The Washington Post*, December 14, 1978; Paul W. Valentine, "City Agrees to Provide More Shelters," *The Washington Post*, December 16, 1978; Paul W. Valentine, "Red Tape is Cut at City's Shelters," *The Washington Post,* January 19, 1979; Paul W. Valentine, "Scattered, Private Shelters Urged," *The Washington Post*, January 20, 1979; Paul W. Valentine, "Barry Backs Small Shelters, Centers for Homeless People," *The Washington Post*, February 15, 1979; Asch and Musgrove, *Chocolate City*, 385-387.

[25] Samuel Allis Washington, "Shelter Offers Squalor, Freedom," *The Washington Post,* October 29, 1979; Samuel Allis Washington, "Inspector Leads Tour of Shelter for Homeless," *The Washington Post,* November 2, 1979; Courtland Miloy, "Shelter Residents Rejoice in Victory Over Eviction," *The Washington Post,* December 19, 1979; Mary Ellen Hombs and Mitch Snyder, *Homelessness in America: A Forced March to Nowhere* (Washington: Community for Creative Non-Violence, 1982), 97-100.

Barry announced steep cuts to the following fiscal year's budget in the spring of 1980. Reducing city services while raising taxes and utilities, the budget slashed funding for schools, healthcare, job training, and recreation, angering the coalition that had brought Barry to power. As a down payment, the administration ordered the immediate closure of the city-run shelters and dissolved the year-old Commission on Homelessness, a move projected to save $400,000 annually. [26]

CCNV sued the city, securing an injunction to keep the Blair and Pierce shelter open. The group also prepared a list of proposed changes they believed would enable the shelters to stay open while reducing their costs by 75%. Used to operating on an austere budget underwritten by donated food and volunteer labor, most of these proposals revolved around cutting paid city staff and service contractors out of the process altogether. Providing expanded shelter services, they argued, could also save in other areas, as less people would seek out emergency rooms or end up in jail. As the winter of 1981 arrived and shelter space stood at a standstill despite the growing need, CCNV regularly confronted the mayor, interrupting his press conferences and pouring their own blood on the District building. To further demonstrate the urgency of expanding shelter access, Snyder and Moss moved outside for the winter, speaking with reporters about the harsh realities of life on the streets. The Barry administration responded to these ongoing challenges with raids on the group's drop-in center.[27]

Barry's austerity budget was reluctantly unrolled. Reagan, however, swept into office with a fervent promise to reduce federal government spending and redraw the boundaries of the social contract. Buttressing defense funding, the administration's 1981 "Program for Economic

[26] Eugene Robinson, "Barry Announces Sharper Cutbacks in Services, Jobs," *The Washington Post,* April 25, 1980; Jack Eisen, "Barry Booed by Crowd at Budget Rally," *The Washington Post,* May 4, 1980; Asch and Musgrove, *Chocolate City*, 395-396.
[27] "Order Blocks City from Closing or Transferring Shelters, *The Washington Post,* May 5, 1980; Hombs and Snyder, *Homelessness in America*, 97-100, 107-121, 130; Rader, *Signal Through the Flames*, 134-137.

Recovery" plan instead proposed deep cuts to domestic programs. Targeted for reductions were programs that provided a fragile yet essential safety net to millions, including Aid to Families with Dependent Children, Food Stamps, Medicaid, the National School Lunch Program, and Supplemental Security Income. The sharpest decrease was to HUD, with authorizations for public housing and Section 8 vouchers halved over two years. While the Democrat controlled Congress blunted Reagan's axe somewhat, the administration's plan reset the parameters of debate and made further cuts possible in future budget cycles. Taking aim at cities and the reform-oriented mayors who ran them, the administration also reduced general revenue sharing, sending less money to distressed urban centers. As these rollbacks were announced, CCNV was in the streets, blocking traffic on Pennsylvania Avenue and organizing civil disobedience actions at the gates of the White House that drew hundreds.[28]

In addition to dramatic demonstrations and appeals from direct experience, CCNV began to arm itself with research in order to counter the Reagan administration and its austerity agenda. With no federal study of the extent of homelessness forthcoming, Hombs conducted a survey of shelter operators and other social service providers in twenty-five cities, using their daily tallies to extrapolate an estimate of the nation's unsheltered population. Taking this approach, Hombs approximated that 2.2 million people—1% of the nation's population—lacked shelter. Widely cited in the media, the number also came under criticism from conservative think tanks and social scientists who criticized its methods. Noting the problems inherent in such a study—not only are local governments recalcitrant to share their records, many who are homeless survive by remaining invisible—Hombs responded that the precondition for an accurate count is to provide

[28] Biles, *The Fate of Cities,* 250-257; Sheldon Danziger and Robert Haveman, "The Reagan Budget: A Sharp Break with the Past," *Challenge* 24 (May-June 1981), 5-13; Beth Rubin, James Wright, and Joel Devine, "Unhousing the Urban Poor: The Reagan Legacy," *The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare* 19, no. 1 (1992), 111-147; Hombs and Snyder, *Homelessness in America*, vi-vii.

accessible shelter for all who need it. How homeless is defined further shapes who counts as such: do those squatting in vacant buildings or staying in cheap motels as their benefit check allows qualify? One-night census counts in shelters and bus stations were not only unlikely to reach such people, they could lead to underestimations that had deadly consequences.[29]

Alongside wrestling with how many people were homeless, CCNV developed an account of the structural factors driving people into the streets in record numbers. In *Homelessness in America: A Forced March to Nowhere*, Hombs and Snyder situate its rise within the era's wider socioeconomic crises and assess the state's role in both creating and exacerbating them. Among the factors they cite in the book are the destruction of deeply affordable housing through urban renewal and gentrification, the "criminal lack of aftercare" following the deinstitutionalization of the mentally ill, inflation and its outsized impact on those with fixed or limited incomes, high rates of unemployment due to deindustrialization and interest rate hikes, and the accumulated effects of racism. The Reagan administration's embrace of domestic austerity, slashing funds for means-tested entitlement and benefit programs while expanding the military budget, only intensifies these unevenly shouldered vulnerabilities. Far from inexplicable, Hombs and Snyder argued, widespread homelessness was rather the foreseeable result of these "policies that kill."[30]

While acknowledging racism as a factor in the emergence of widespread homelessness, including how the streets "are filled with a hugely disproportionate number of men and women of color," CCNV's analysis of its structural role was underdeveloped and relied on euphemisms such as "the burden of history." In the process, Hombs and Snyder also neglected the racialized aims animating austerity policy and the deployment of raced and gendered narratives to secure

[29] Hombs and Snyder, *Homelessness in America*, xvi, 8-16; Carl F. Horowitz, "Mitch Snyder's Phony Numbers," *Policy Review* 49 (Summer 1989), 66-69; Peter H. Rossi, *Down and Out in America: The Origins of Homelessness* (Chicago: Chicago, 1989), 45-70.
[30] Hombs and Snyder, *Homelessness in America*, 4-7, 18-42.

its unfolding. Missing these connections not only revealed the limits of homeless advocates' class-centered analyses, they also undercut opportunities for coalition building with other populations targeted by the Reagan administration's criminalizing and pathologizing rhetoric.[31]

Together with other activists and advocates, CCNV reported on the state of homelessness at Congressional hearings called by Democrat-controlled committees in the House, offering a counter-narrative to the Reagan administration's claims that the effects of its cuts were minimal and aimed mostly at eliminating fraud and waste. Purging disability rolls, restricting food stamp eligibility, and withdrawing heating oil assistance, CCNV asserted, resulted only in more people living on the streets, standing in cheese lines, and gathering around burn barrels to stay warm. While the rise in homelessness over the previous decade was driven largely by the disastrous rollout of deinstitutionalization, Hombs testified, its exponential growth in the first two years of the Reagan administration encompassed a much broader swath of the population, including many who were well educated and only recently belonged to the middle class. As such, it should be seen as the product of calculated political choices: "To come to an understanding of this broad-scale new homelessness is to simultaneously free its victims from the notion that they have failed themselves, their families, and their Nation's ideals. It is to place the blame where it belongs, on cutbacks in social services budgets, elimination of entire programs on which people depend, unemployment and the abysmal failure of Reaganomics." Not receiving benefits of any kind,

[31] On the ways that race and gender bias shaped the Reagan administration's efforts to refashion housing policy, see Rosemary Ndubuizu, "Reagan's Austerity Bureaucrats: Examining the Racial and Gender Bias of Ronald Reagan's Housing Vouchers," *Du Bois Review* 16, no.2 (2019), 535-554. On the role of criminalizing and pathologizing rhetoric in the expansion of the carceral state and retraction of the welfare state, see Julilly Kohler-Hausmann, *Getting Tough: Welfare and Imprisonment in 1970s America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017). Earl James Edwards asserts that the image of the homeless cultivated by advocates such as Snyder and the New York Coalition for the Homeless' Robert Hayes, while challenging the criminalizing portrait of the 'underclass,' was colorblind; as such it obscured both the disparate impact of homelessness on Black populations and its roots in anti-Black racism. While I offer a more complex portrait premised on my reading of advocates' analyses, I reach similar conclusions regarding their overall effects. See Earl James Edwards, "Who Are the Homeless? Centering Anti-Black Racism and the Consequences of Colorblind Homeless Policies," *Social Sciences* 10, vol. 9 (2021), 340.

millions of unemployed people were turning to food pantries and emergency shelters for the first time in their lives amidst the recession—and often finding there was nothing left to offer them.[32]

As the damage from the induced downturn accumulated, CCNV plotted on how to place the suffering at the President's doorstep. With comparisons to the Great Depression appearing regularly in the news, Snyder's mind turned to the Hoovervilles encampments of the 1930s. On Thanksgiving Day in 1981, the group erected a cluster of tents in Lafayette Park directly across from the White House, putting up a sign in front of them: "Welcome to Reaganville. Population Growing Daily. Reaganomics at Work." Staying the night, a small group of CCNV members and homeless residents were arrested the next morning for unauthorized camping in a federal park. Several days later, the group put the tents back up but left them empty, placing before them forty-five white crosses. Each bore the name of someone in Washington who died from lack of shelter. Soon they invited the growing homeless advocacy network across the country to add others, bringing the total to nearly six hundred, a grim witness intended to "confront public and official indifference" and "show the human devastation caused by the budget cuts." CCNV also appealed the ban in court, with its lawyers claiming that the protest constituted protected speech. To their surprise a federal judge concurred, and the tents were occupied through the winter.[33]

Intending to expand the encampment the following winter to include the National Mall, CCNV's plans were disrupted when a judge denied the permit, contradicting the earlier ruling. While the case wound its way through the courts—ultimately going before the Supreme Court, where the sleeping ban was upheld with Thurgood Marshall and William Brennan dissenting—

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[32] Mary Ellen Hombs, quote from: U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Banking, Finance, and Urban Affairs: Hearings on Homelessness in America, 97th Cong., 2nd. sess., 1982, 13-14.
[33] Alice Bonner, "'Reaganville' Residents Arrested by Park Police," *The Washington Post,* November 28, 1981; Alice Bonner, "Activist Group Regains Permit to Build Tent Village Here," *The Washington Post,* December 2, 1981; "Appeals Court Says Protestors May Camp Near White House," *The Washington Post,* January 23, 1982; Rader, *Signal Through the Flames*, 148-152.

the group discussed other symbolic spaces they could occupy, settling on the Capitol Rotunda. As Snyder recounted in his congressional testimony, the Capitol building had served temporarily as a hospital during the Civil War. This, too, was a national emergency; what better way to demonstrate the need for concerted action on homelessness than to transform the Capitol into a winter shelter? Entreating each member of Congress, Snyder and Fennelly received letters of general support but no offers to back their proposal. Committed to making their presence known, the group resolved to take over the site at a time when everyone would be there: the 1983 State of the Union. Again sending letters to Congress, they promised to stay until a national state of emergency was declared, federal buildings were made available for use as emergency shelters, and all surplus food held by USDA released for those in need. They only made it several hours before being carried away by Capitol police. Their demands, however, did not go completely unanswered. In February, the White House ordered HUD to work with GSA, DOD, and FEMA to make sites available for temporary use as shelters, to be managed by local governments or charitable organizations. Further, the emergency jobs package passed the following month contained $100 million for food and shelter programs. A small amount woefully unmatched to the scale of the crisis, the funding could only be used to provide temporary relief. Nevertheless, the money set an important precedent, involving the federal government for the first time in funding services specifically for the homeless.[34]

The Reagan administration and its dogged pursuit of austerity served as the perfect foil to CCNV and its vision of a compassionate society, propelling the group's national media profile.

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[34] Al Kamen, "Homeless Can't Sleep in Parks, Judge Rules," *The Washington Post,* December 4, 1982; Fred Barbash, "Court Supports Ban on Sleep-Ins in U.S. Parks," *The Washington Post,* June 30, 1984; Mitch Snyder, quote from: U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Banking, Finance, and Urban Affairs: Hearings on Homelessness in America, 97th Cong., 2nd. sess., 1982, 17; Fennelly and Snyder to Members of Congress, November 24, 1982; Mitch Snyder to Members of Congress, December 27, 1982, Box 4, Carol Fennelly Papers; Joe Pichirallo, "U.S. Buildings Available for Shelters," *The Washington Post,* February 26, 1983; Steven V. Roberts, "President Signs a 4.6 Billion Job Bill," *The New York Times*, March 25, 1983.

Increasingly aware of the limits of local action absent a wider reallocation of state resources, the activists seized on their proximity to federal power, waging campaigns that targeted the president and Congress as often as they did the mayor and city council. CCNV and its most prominent spokesperson Mitch Snyder were sanctimonious, stubborn, and often unpopular. With seemingly depthless levels of commitment, they were also a force to be reckoned with. Building on this momentum, the group began its biggest battles yet, fighting to create a centrally-located model shelter using federal funds and instill a legal right to overnight shelter within the nation's capital.

"They Obvious Don't Want Us Here": The Fight for Federal City Shelter and Initiative 17

No longer able to deny homelessness was a problem, many officials saw it as a temporary phenomenon, one that would subside as the economy recovered and unemployment declined. As such, they responded to it with emergency one-time measures, such as the funding for food and shelter doled out by FEMA. Those closer to the ground, though, recognized that the roots of the crisis ran much deeper than the latest recession and that solving homelessness required structural transformations decades in the making. In the meantime, though, people were dying; systems of care and provision needed to be created. CCNV hoped to transform the nation's capital into an example, working to build an extensive shelter with access to on-site services while expanding the rights of the homeless to access shelter citywide. In the process, they would engage in a complex dance of confrontation and collaboration with both the federal and District government, pairing protest and partnership while further exposing the fissures between the Reagan and Barry administrations. Securing some of their greatest campaign victories, CCNV's successes in this period also registered homelessness' passage into a permanent state of affairs.

While surplus federal buildings were now eligible for use as shelters by local community groups, six months later only a few cities had followed through. As CCNV considered its winter

campaign, they began to explore the idea of utilizing available space in the federal core, a move which would allow them to significantly increase the number of beds in the city. Working with federal agencies, and especially the Reagan administration, was a difficult circle to square for a group that fashioned themselves Christian anarchists. Members debated whether doing so would compromise their politics or lead to their cooptation, ultimately deciding it was an opportunity neither they nor the homeless could afford to pass up. After some scouting the group determined that the former Federal City College at 2nd and D St NW was their best option, both for its large size and central location. Built during the New Deal, the building had earlier been home to the Reconstruction Finance Corporation and stood empty since the college was consolidated to form the University of the District of Columbia. Inquiring with the Task Force on Homelessness and Hunger, CCNV anticipated resistance. Instead, they found unlikely supporters in Susan Baker, wife of Reagan's chief of staff James Baker and a task force member, and Margaret Heckler, Health and Human Services Secretary. While GSA was disinclined to release the site—and the city was reluctant to hold the lease, fearing they would end up being financially responsible—Baker and Heckler overcame their objections, securing an agreement within a swift two weeks.[35]

Set to open on Christmas Eve, major electrical repairs forced several weeks of delays. With a cold front expected the following night, Snyder made an appeal on the evening news for interim space. Oliver Carr, one of the city's most prominent developers, responded, offering the vacant Hotel Presidential. Soon it was hosting four hundred. Meanwhile work continued on the shelter, with volunteer plumbers installing toilets, DOD supplying five hundred cots, and a local department store donating blankets. Donations helped to cover other startup costs. The Federal City Shelter opened on January 15, 1984, Martin Luther King's birthday, with a press conference

[35] Joe Pichirallo, "Accord Reached on Homeless Shelter oat Old Campus," *The Washington Post,* February 26, 1983; Rader, *Signal Through the Flames*, 200-206.

and celebration. Snyder's praise for political officials and developers raised eyebrows for some, who thought the group was being used for a photo op and should know better. CCNV did not see it that way, however, with Snyder commenting "we are seeing a breakthrough…this building can serve as an example and a model from one end of the country to the other." Whatever the intents of its backers, the need for the shelter was clear. Within weeks, 750 people crossed its doors.[36]

CCNV also worked with Democratic members of the House to arrange a second set of hearings on homelessness, this time held in the basement of the shelter. Providing a dramatic backdrop for the testimonies of advocates, big city mayors, and those experiencing homelessness directly, the hearings were held just hours before Reagan's 1984 State of the Union address and offered a sharp counterpoint to his claim to oversee "one of the best recoveries in decades." The first panel featured seven whose knowledge on homelessness was a result of personal experience, including two who temporarily resided upstairs. Russell Watson and Sherry Partlow Vanover each told of their struggles to find work and inability to secure ever-tighter benefits as they fell. Chicago mayor Harold Washington called for increased federal dollars for cities and social services and the creation of job and housing programs to address the root conditions driving homelessness. Snyder implored the committee to introduce legislation establishing a national right to overnight shelter and immediately direct $60 million from the 1983 housing act toward shelter programs. While already appropriated, HUD had yet to expend the funds, part of a larger pattern of agency passivity under Samuel Pierce's leadership and indicative of the Reagan administration's refusal to support permanent and ongoing programs for the homeless.[37]

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[36] Myron Struck, "Water, Electricity Lack Raises Doubt Of UDC Building Becoming Shelter," *The Washington Post,* December 23, 1983; Sharon LaFraniere and Michael Martinez, "Oliver Carr Opens Hotel Presidential for D.C. Homeless," *The Washington Post,* December 25, 1983; Michael Kernan, "Mitch Snyder: The Wayward Shepherd," *The Washington Post,* January 11, 1984; Ed Bruske, "Cooperation Marks Opening of Shelter," *The Washington Post,* January 16, 1984; Rader, *Signal Through the Flames*, 206-212.

[37] U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Banking, Finance, and Urban Affairs: Hearings on Homelessness in America II, 98th Cong., 2nd. sess., 1984; Mary McGrory, "State of the Union Seems Less Rosy at

CCNV found itself before Congress again in May after HUD released a study estimating the nationwide homeless population at 250,000-300,000, a figure which led Acting Assistant Housing Secretary Benjamin Bobo to remark that homelessness "is not as widespread a problem as previously had been thought." A tenth of the figure approximated by Hombs, Snyder cast the report as a dishonest and inaccurate document driven more by political concerns than scientific inquiry. Following up with providers surveyed in the study, many of which CCNV had worked with in coalitions, the group found numerous examples of deceptive or misleading questioning, with respondents unclear whether they were being asked about the number who sought shelter, the number of people who remained on the street, or their sense of the total population served. In addition to criticizing the study's methods and motivations before Congress, CCNV, the National Coalition for Homelessness, and others filed a lawsuit in federal court demanding its retraction. While the suit was dismissed, the "numbers controversy," as it came to be known, continued.[38]

The temporary nature of federal relief was intimately felt at 2nd and D, which was scheduled to close on April 1st. By now 900 resided there; where would they go? Planning to march with the shelter residents and occupy Lafayette Park en masse, the group received a phone call from the White House granting them a two-week extension on the lease. Two days later, the phone rang again: at Reagan's personal order, they would be allowed to remain at Federal City until a relocation plan was devised. The planned demonstration instead became a celebration,

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Shelter for the Homeless," *The Washington Post,* January 16, 1984; Alma Guillermoprieto and Ed Bruske, "Media Event Gives Shelter Dwellers a Warm Feeling," *The Washington Post,* January 16, 1984; Ronald Reagan, State of the Union Address, January 25, 1984, Ronald Reagan Presidential Foundation and Institute, https://www.reaganfoundation.org/media/128608/union3.pdf (accessed November 30, 2022).

[38] U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Banking, Finance, and Urban Affairs and Committee on Government Operations, Joint Hearings on HUD Report on Homelessness, 98th Cong., 2nd. sess., 1984; Howard Kurtz, "HUD Says Numbers of U.S. Homeless Fall Well Below Private Estimates," *The Washington Post,* May 2, 1984; Alma Guillermoprieto, "HUD Report on Homeless Derided and is Target of Joint Hill Hearings, *The Washington Post,* May 18, 1984; Al Kamen, "Suit Asks Retraction of Study on Homelessness," *The Washington Post,* June 22, 1984; Philip Smith, "Judge Dismisses Suit Disputing HUD Report," *The Washington Post,* September 7, 1984.

with Heckler making a brief speech and Snyder relaying his hopes that the group could have a permanent model shelter by the following winter, a request which so far had been denied. While publicly declaring a victory, CCNV's forty members privately wondered if they won anything at all. Exhausted from staffing the shelter around the clock, their twelve-week campaign now had no end date. Better than being outside, conditions at the decrepit building were still dangerous, with multiple fire and health hazards and fights breaking out from overcrowding. Members also questioned whether a giant shelter was a worthy goal to strive for in the first place, concerned that it was simply a cheaper way to warehouse people that did little to alleviate their misery. Some members left, others descended into conflict, substance use, and depression.[39]

While CCNV was falling apart at the seams, the Reagan administration was touting Federal City Shelter as a shining example of public-private partnership. A resource guide HHS produced on resources available to food banks and shelter programs featured a picture of Heckler speaking at the shelter's opening ceremony. The pamphlet, which was careful to narrate that "the primary responsibility in helping the homeless lies with local governments and private and/or philanthropic organizations," then described GSA's role in making the space available. It also outlined other sources of support, such as the approval of $8 million to convert excess DOD facilities into shelters. (GAO evaluators later discovered that the Pentagon diverted nearly all the funding to the Army Reserve.) The guide cast the needs of the homeless as "a special concern" necessitating a "coordinated effort." In reality, federal budget allocations on homelessness between fiscal years 1983-1985 were equivalent to what New York City spent annually.[40]

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[39] Community For Creative Non-Violence, "All God's Children Gotta Sleep: A March for Shelter flyer," April 1, 1984, Box 4, Fennelly Papers; Michel Marriott, "500 Gather to Celebrate Shelter Rescue," *The Washington Post,* April 2, 1984; Sandra Evans, "Huge Shelter for Homeless Beset by Health, Fire Hazards," *The Washington Post,* July 28, 1984; Rader, *Signal Through the Flames*, 214-218.

[40] U.S. Department of Health and Human Resources, *Sheltering and Feeding the Homeless: A Resource Guide*, 1984, Box 15, Fennelly Papers; Michel Marriott, "Defense Diverted Funds Congress Appropriated To Shelter the

New York's spending on homeless services was not due only to its long tradition of municipally administered welfare. In 1979 Robert Hayes sued the state on behalf of three homeless men, claiming that the city had offered them no accommodation in violation of the state constitution's provision to aid and support those in need. *Callahan v. Carey* led to a consent decree two years later that established a legal right to overnight shelter for single homeless men and outlined standards for the operation of shelters, including capacity limits mandating their expansion. Hayes would go on to form the Coalition for the Homeless with Ellen Baxter and Kim Hopper, researchers who had published an influential report on homelessness in New York City. CCNV's 1980 suit following Barry's announcement of the pending closure of the city-run shelters argued along similar lines to *Callahan* that the city had an obligation to prioritize the basic needs of its residents. Lacking New York's constitutional provision, though, federal judges disagreed. If the group wanted to follow in the Coalition's footsteps and secure a legal right to overnight shelter in Washington, it would need to find another route than litigation.[41]

CCNV turned to the ballot initiative, collecting more than enough signatures to place a referendum before District voters in 1984. In the process they also helped secure the right of the homeless to vote, convincing the Board of Elections to allow two men to list the steam grate at 21st and E Streets NW as their fixed address. Concerned about the implications for the city's already troubled finances, the Barry administration sued the Board of Elections to have the measure (Initiative 17) removed six weeks before the vote. When this strategy failed, the city illegally spent government funds on posters and pamphlets urging a "NO" vote and used city

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Homeless," *The Washington Post,* October 8, 1984; Joe Conason, "Body Count: How the Reagan Administration Hides the Homeless," *The Village Voice*, December 5, 1985.

[41] Mary Ellen Hombs, *American Homelessness: A Reference Book* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 1994), 128-130; Wells, "Decent Place to Stay," 168-173; on New York City's mid-century network of municipal welfare institutions and their unraveling amidst the fiscal crises of the 1970s, see Kim Phillips-Fein, *Fear City: New York's Fiscal Crisis and the Rise of Austerity Politics* (New York: Metropolitan, 2017).

employees as its political organizers. Not only would the measure bankrupt the city, Barry and his representatives claimed, it also deflected proper responsibility from the federal government.[42]

In urging a rejection of the shelter referendum, the city received support from a surprising corner: the D.C. Coalition for the Homeless. Not to be confused with the New York or National Coalitions, the D.C. Coalition for the Homeless was comprised of local shelter operators, faith-based organizations, and service providers, many of whom had long been at odds with Snyder and CCNV over their divisive tactics and go-it-alone approach. The Coalition was concerned that passage of the initiative would lead to the warehousing of the homeless, drawing funding away from smaller shelters and diminishing the quality of services. Some of its members also feared that declaring shelter a right would draw homeless people from elsewhere, overwhelming the existing support system. Snyder responded to these arguments by pointing to the experience of New York, where no noticeable influx of homeless people occurred following the consent decree. Offering shelter up front, he asserted, was also more cost effective than providing it through hospitalization or incarceration. Ultimately, he argued, money was not the issue: "Even if passage of Initiative 17 cost millions of dollars a year, it wouldn't really matter. What matters most is that it is the just and necessary thing to do." Throughout the summer and fall, CCNV members and outside volunteers continued to make that case.[43]

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[42] Community for Creative Non-Violence, "Shelter for the Homeless: Initiative 17: D.C. Right to Overnight Shelter Act of 1984 brochure," Box 24, Fennelly Papers; Susan F. Rasky, "A Right to Live, A Right to Vote," *The New York Times*, August 29, 1984; Marcia Slacum Greene, "Ballot Initiative to Propose D.C. Shelters for Homeless," *The Washington Post,* August 2, 1984; Susan G. Boodman, "D.C. Sues to Bar Shelter Initiative," *The Washington Post,* October 12, 1984; Wells, "Decent Place to Stay," 173-174.

[43] Karlyn Barker, "Battle on Homelessness," *The Washington Post,* November 4, 1984; Mitch Snyder, "Should we 'require' shelter for the homeless? Yes," *The Washington Post,* October 11, 1984; ironically, the chair of the D.C. Coalition for the Homeless tasked with publicly refuting the initiative was Marie Nahikian, formerly of AMO. See Marie Nahikian, "Should we 'require' shelter for the homeless? No," *The Washington Post,* October 11, 1984. She would later state that while sharing the Coalition's concerns about warehousing the homeless, she was conflicted about coming out against the initiative and shared its motives. See Nahikian, interview by Decker, May 11, 2016.

Nor did Snyder intend to let the federal government off the hook, calling for a public fast and month of civil disobedience actions coinciding with the 1984 election. Protesting Reagan's policies and attempting to prevent his reelection, the campaign would also seek to secure $5 million in federal funds for the shelter's renovation. CCNV's members, frayed from running the shelter and campaigning for Initiative 17, questioned their capacity to engage in yet another set of bruising fights. Snyder, however, mandated that they push on through, threatening to leave if they did not support his plans. Begrudgingly the group acceded, and five members began their collective fast on September 15. Two weeks later, the Harvest of Shame campaign commenced, with affinity groups seeking arrest at the White House gates in protest of rollbacks on women's rights, attacks on organized labor, and military intervention in Central America and Grenada. Protesters also entered the executive complex on arranged tours, conducting a pray-in on the front lawn and releasing cockroaches in the State Dining Room, a reference to both the only species rumored to survive nuclear war and the deplorable conditions at the shelter.[44]

While the civil disobedience campaign was largely ignored by the media, the fast gained the public's attention as the election drew closer and Snyder's health began to deteriorate. With the others halting their fasts after being hospitalized, Snyder was now alone in his hunger strike and nearing fifty days subsisting only on water. Reuniting CCNV around a collective purpose, the fast also rallied officials to his bedside. Representatives Tip O'Neill and Henry Gonzalez, the House Speaker and chair of the House Subcommittee on Housing and Community Development, respectively, urged the White House to allocate the funds and Snyder to abandon his fast. Three

[44] Community For Creative Non-Violence, "Harvest of Shame flyer," October 1984, Box 4, Fennelly Papers; Steven Donziger, "CCNV's Month of Outrage," *Washington Socialist*, September-October 1984; John Ward Anderson, "27 Arrested at White House in Protest of Homelessness," *The Washington Post,* October 25, 1984; Philip Smith, "74 Arrested in Finale of White House Protest," *The Washington Post,* November 4, 1984; Sandra G. Boodman, "Vision of Service, Life of Poverty," *The Washington Post,* November 4, 1984; Rader *Signal Through the Flames*, 218-226.

days before the election, Heckler, James Baker, and inter-agency task force head Harvey Vieth quietly opened negotiations with the group, going back and forth for hours over the terms of the shelter's renovation. While not agreeing to a specific dollar figure, the team drew up a statement outlining the administration's commitment to transform Federal City into a model shelter that included separate floors for men and women, lockers for personal belongings, kitchen and laundry facilities, a first aid station, and offices for social services consultations. With Snyder set to appear hours later on *Sixty Minutes*, Reagan approved the arrangement on Sunday afternoon. In and out of consciousness after having lost sixty-two pounds, Snyder was carried down to the Euclid House living room, where he broke his fast by taking communion and a sip of bullion.[45]

The funding of the model shelter was not CCNV's only victory that week. On Tuesday 72% of District voters approved the right to overnight shelter—the first city to do so by ballot measure. A rebuke of the Barry administration's tepid response to a growing crisis, the "YES" vote also signaled the city's support for a more compassionate approach towards the homeless. Like support for statehood and the constitutional charter, it demonstrated that the city's Black majority did not move in lock step with its political class, resisting the logics of austerity. Between the shelter renovation commitment and the win on Initiative 17, CCNV's time, it seemed, had finally come. Even as Snyder's detractors decried what they regarded as his "suicide tantrum" and D.C. Coalition members continued to question putting money into the massive shelter, what other group had commanded the government's attention at all levels? While Snyder recuperated in the hospital, Fennelly fielded phone calls from Hollywood producers hoping to

[45] Sandra G. Boodman, "Mitch Snyder Weakens as Protest Continues," *The Washington Post,* November 1, 1984; Sandra G. Boodman, "U.S. Official Visits Shelter," *The Washington Post,* November 3, 1984; Paul Fine and Holly Fine, "Mitch Snyder," *Sixty Minutes*, CBS, November 4, 1984; Margaret Heckler, "Statement of Health and Human Services Secretary Margaret Heckler Authorizing Renovation," November 4, 1984, Box 15, Fennelly Papers; Sandra G. Boodman, "Reagan Agrees to Refurbish Homeless Shelter," *The Washington Post,* November 5, 1984

tell the group's story. The group concluded the year with a Christmas Eve feast for one thousand guests, held in the lobby of the HHS building.[46]

CCNV's success proved to be a brief interlude. On New Year's Day, a staff member was stabbed at the shelter by a resident. While he survived, bad press from the incident emboldened the group's critics, who cast both the shelter and the group's laissez faire management style as dangerous. Three days later, city attorneys were in Superior Court arguing for Initiative 17 to be overturned. Administration lawyers contended that the measure was invalid because it forced the city to appropriate funds, violating an earlier ruling barring referenda from doing so. That power, they argued, belonged not to the electorate but the legislature. The judge hearing the case agreed, invalidating the right to shelter law in July. Applauding the decision for preserving "the integrity of the budget process," Barry reiterated the city's commitment to support the homeless. Yet at the time the available city-run beds stood at 753, less than the number housed at Federal City alone, and most private shelters in the area turned people away or operated beyond capacity during the winter months. Denouncing the ruling, Snyder vowed to appeal the decision.[47]

Things started out more promising on the federal front. Utilizing an emergency NEA grant, CCNV brought in a team of advanced architecture students from the City University of New York to design the new facility. Hoping to endow the cavernous space with some elements of home, the design included partitioned personal space for each resident including a locker and

[46] Sandra G. Boodman, "Voters Approve Homeless' Right to Shelter," *The Washington Post,* November 7, 1984; Sandra G. Boodman, "City Softens Opposition to Shelter Initiative," *The Washington Post,* November 7, 1984; Michael Berenbaum and Judith Rosenfeld, "Snyder's Suicide Tantrum," *The Washington Post,* November 11, 1984; Sandra G. Boodman, "Shelter Gets Aid, Problems Remain," *The Washington Post,* November 11, 1984; Sandra G. Boodman, "Snyder: Final Hours Hardest," *The Washington Post,* November 6, 1984; Anndee Hochman, "Homeless Get Holiday Meal," *The Washington Post,* December 25, 1984.

[47] Martin Weil and Lyle V. Harris, "Staff Member is Stabbed at D.C. Shelter," *The Washington Post,* January 2, 1985; Ed Bruske, "D.C. Shelter Initiative Gets Hearing," *The Washington Post,* January 5, 1985; Elsa Walsh, "D.C. Ballot on Homeless Ruled Invalid," *The Washington Post,* July 23, 1985; Ruth Marcus, "Are Shelters Fill Up As the Mercury Drops," *The Washington Post,* January 17, 1985.

electrical outlets. The plans also called to subdivide the shelter into five smaller villages, each with their own dining and lounge areas and bathrooms. A drop-in center, counseling offices, commercial kitchen, laundry, and clinic were drawn up for the basement, which closed in April to start preparing for the renovations. There was only one problem: the price to realize this vision was significantly more than the $5 million Snyder had demanded months before. Claiming the plans prepared by CCNV's architects would cost at least $10 million to complete, GSA instead said they would spend $2 to $5 million to repair the building and extend its life for three to five years. After all, Vieth contended, the shelter was never intended to be a permanent institution. Calling it a "patch up job" in betrayal of a promise, an incensed Snyder walked from their May meeting and announced that CCNV would not order the residents to clear out for construction.[48]

Given the insignificance of an additional $5 million to the federal government, the real concern of the Reagan appointees was likely precedent. If CCNV could force the administration to build a comprehensive model shelter in Washington, other cities could follow suit. Blaming Snyder's intransigence, officials announced in June that they were rescinding the agreement previously made with the group. Snyder and Fennelly demanded to meet with Reagan directly while CCNV's lawyers sued to enforce the renovation agreement in court. Federal officials then announced that they would close the shelter and raze the building, ordering CCNV and shelter residents to vacate the premises within two weeks. Temporarily halting the eviction to allow the renovation suit to proceed, a federal judge then ruled in August that the facility was unfit for human habitation and that the planned closure of the shelter could continue—but only after the

[48] Benjamin Forgey, "Building a Home for the Homeless," *The Washington Post,* January 17, 1985; Jack Anderson and Dale Van Atta, "Model Shelter or Work-House?" *The Washington Post,* July 21, 1985; Michel Marriott, "Part of D.C. Shelter Shut for Renovation Amid Funding Doubts," *The Washington Post,* April 23, 1985; Michel Marriott, "Shelter Plan at Impasse," *The Washington Post,* June 1, 1985; Mitch Snyder to Margaret Heckler, June 6, 1985, Box 15, Carol Fennelly Papers.

federal government arranged alternative accommodations for the nearly 600 people who stayed there. CCNV immediately appealed the decision, contending that no such facility existed.[49]

HHS officials scrambled to find space and a new shelter operator. Initially proposing the use of temporary trailers on city-owned locations, the federal government announced that the $2.7 million it intended to spend on the renovation would instead be turned over to the D.C. Coalition for the Homeless, who would run the facilities through April 1. The plan was scuttled when Barry rejected placing the trailers on District property. Appearing at a press conference next to Snyder, the mayor declared that finding alternative housing for the residents of 2nd and D was the federal government's responsibility alone and that the city would not assist in carrying out evictions at the shelter. A shrewd move, the stance enabled Barry to both be seen as taking on Reagan and evade any city liability for directly supporting the residents. Federal officials then identified an abandoned Navy building located across the Anacostia River. While neighborhood residents cheered on by Snyder protested, there was little they could do; the proposed site was federal property. The Coalition-operated Anacostia shelter opened in November with 600 beds.[50]

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[49] Arthur S. Brisbane, "Government Protests Delay at Shelter," *The Washington Post,* June 7, 1985; Sandra Evans, "D.C. Advocate for Homeless Seeks Meeting with Reagan Over Shelter," *The Washington Post,* June 1, 1985; Mitch Snyder to Ronald Reagan, June 13, 1985, Box 15, Carol Fennelly Papers; Sandra G. Boodman, "U.S. Pulls Out of Shelter Agreement," *The Washington Post,* June 13, 1985; Sandra G. Boodman, "Group Sues Over Shelter Renovations," *The Washington Post,* June 18, 1985; Sandra G. Boodman, "U.S. to Close Shelter for Homeless," *The Washington Post,* June 22, 1985; Courtland Miloy, "Judge Halts Posting of Closure Bills," *The Washington Post,* June 23, 1985; Kenneth Bredemeier, "CCNV Files Appeal of Federal Shelter-Closing Verdict," *The Washington Post,* August 21, 1985.

[50] Kenneth Bredemeier, "U.S. Finding Little Luck on Shelter Space," *The Washington Post,* August 21, 1985; Kenneth Bredemeier, "Barry Bars City Role in Shelter," *The Washington Post,* August 21, 1985; Arthur S. Brisbane, "Barry Rejects Federal Plan for Homeless," *The Washington Post,* September 21, 1985; Ed Bruske, "Moving of Homeless to Anacostia Protested," *The Washington Post,* October 1, 1985; Ruth Marcus and Arthur Brisbane, "U.S. Firm on Anacostia Shelter," *The Washington Post,* October 16, 1985; Ruth Marcus and Arthur Brisbane, "Anacostia Shelter Stands Ready for the Homeless," *The Washington Post,* November 7, 1985. On the politics of shelter siting and the resistance of historically disinvested neighborhoods to hosting new facilities—and how the arguments these neighborhoods made were more complex than the traditional politics of white NIMBYism, see Ariel Eisenberg, ""A Shelter Can Tip the Scale Sometimes": Disinvestment, Gentrification, and the Neighborhood Politics of Homelessness in 1980s New York City," *Journal of Urban History* 43, no.6 (2017):915-931.

With the new space available, the court ruled that the federal government had fulfilled its obligation and could now proceed with closing the CCNV shelter. While some Federal City residents voluntarily relocated to the Anacostia facility, others protested the move, pointing out that its remote location was far from both essential services and their everyday routines. When transport vans showed up to relocate them, a group of fifty residents promptly drove them off. Returning to court in a last-ditch effort to block the eviction, CCNV argued that with a total capacity of 660 between the new men's and women's shelters and beds already filling up, there would not be enough space to house all those displaced from Federal City. When federal lawyers charged that the group exaggerated how many stayed at the shelter, council member Dave Clarke conducted his own headcount, demonstrating that the two shelters had a combined population of 759. If no other solutions were provided, people would be discharged into the December cold.[51]

On December 10th an appeals court upheld the closure and US Marshals posted eviction notices. Snyder replied that neither CCNV nor the residents would leave voluntarily—if federal officials wanted them out of the building, they would have to drag them out. The group welded steel reinforcements on the front doors and initiated a walkie talkie patrol to stand guard. More political theater than feasible plan, the group could no doubt be expelled quickly through violent force. Unbeknownst to CCNV, HHS chief of staff C. McClain Haddow had begun to prepare for such a scenario, sending undercover law enforcement into the shelter to search for weapons and initiating training exercises to tactically clear the building. Federal officials and D.C. Coalition representatives also went on an offensive in the media, describing the shelter as "Jonestown on the Potomac" and conjecturing that Snyder was a cult leader preparing his mentally unstable

[51] Lawrence Feinberg, "Shelter Closing Approved," *The Washington Post,* November 20, 1985; Arthur Brisbane and Lyle V. Harris, "Homeless Demonstrate Against Move," *The Washington Post,* November 15, 1985; "Court Blocks Closing of CCNV Homeless Shelter," *The Washington Post,* November 21, 1985; Lawrence Feinberg, "U.S. Says CCNV Exaggerates Population of Its Shelter," *The Washington Post,* November 26, 1985.

army for a violent showdown. On December 27th, Haddow announced on television the government's intention to secure the building and that all residents would be forcibly evicted within the next few days. CCNV responded by stockpiling food, water, and cigarettes and preparing to barricade the doors. Then they waited.[52]

The anticipated eviction never came. Reagan personally intervened, rejecting the plan to storm the building after an appeal from a senator whose aide volunteered at the shelter. The group considered the reprieve a miracle, yet they were also back where they started, overseeing a dilapidated shelter with no clear end in sight. After standing on the sidelines throughout the confrontation, the Barry administration committed $250,000 for emergency repairs in early January, ensuring the building made it through winter. As relations thawed between federal and city officials, they began to quietly explore a plan for a longer-term system of smaller shelters that would not place CCNV at the center. Concerned that they were being cut out—and that their last two years at Federal City would come to nothing—CCNV returned to a well-worn tactic. In February, Snyder announced that he and twelve others would begin a new fast, continuing until the Reagan administration provided $7.5 million to complete the renovation according to their original plans. Four weeks later, the Reagan administration offered to transfer the building to the District government along with $5 million if Snyder ceased his hunger strike. While hoping to avoid any arrangement where they could again be held hostage to CCNV's demands, officials' stances towards the group had softened as improper spending and financial conflicts of interest within the D.C. Coalition for the Homeless came to light, prompting an FBI investigation. After

[52] *Promises to Keep*, VHS, directed by Ginny Durrin (Washington, DC: Durrin Productions, 1988); Lawrence Feinberg, "U.S. Appeals Court Upholds Closure Of CCNV Shelter," *The Washington Post,* December 11, 1985; Ed Bruske, "CCNV Shelter Officially Closed," *The Washington Post,* December 13, 1985; Margaret Engel, "Barry Urged to Use Police To Get Homeless Into Shelters," *The Washington Post,* December 28, 1985; Lee Hockstader and John Mintz, "Reagan Blocks Eviction at Shelter," *The Washington Post,* December 29, 1985.

initially refusing the offer, and when a $6 million compromise put forward by city officials was rejected by the White House, a pale and gaunt Snyder begrudgingly accepted the deal. CCNV would seek to raise the additional funds needed to fully realize their vision for the shelter through private donations, starting with the growing number of celebrity supporters in its Rolodex.[53]

In order to be ready for the following winter, renovations would need to begin almost immediately. Instead of releasing discretionary funds as agreed, the administration punted the matter to Congress, saying it would have to appropriate the money for the shelter. Not only did an emergency appropriations bill need to be shuttled through two chambers in which many held hostile views towards Snyder and CCNV, the title of the building remained to be transferred to the District. With the delays compounding, the group announced a third fast starting on June 1st. Hundreds of its supporters nationwide promised to join Snyder and the other twenty-six fasters if the matter was not resolved in four days. Senator Mark Hatfield, a moderate Republican with ties to the peace movement, stepped in to shepherd the appropriations and title transfer process while pressuring the administration to release an immediate payment so that construction could begin. The White House released $965,000 and the four-day fast was broken. Overcoming objections on his party's right flank, Hatfield secured the rest of the funding, increasing the total federal contribution to $6.5 million. Renovations to the southern half of the three-story building began shortly thereafter, with one section remaining open for residents and millions yet left to raise.[54]

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[53] Mary McGrory, "Homeless Win One Over Rambo," *The Washington Post,* December 31, 1985; Karlyn Barker, "$250,000 Pledged for CCNV Shelter," *The Washington Post,* January 4, 1986; Mary McGrory, "Sheltering a Costly Grudge," *The Washington Post,* February 25, 1986; Eve Zibart and David Hoffman, "Reagan Offers City CCNV Shelter, $5 Million," *The Washington Post,* March 16, 1986; John Mintz and Barbara Carton, "Snyder Agrees to Deal on D.C. Homeless Shelter," *The Washington Post,* March 17, 1986; Arthur S. Brisbane and Joe Pichirallo, "Homeless Issue Alliances Shift," *The Washington Post,* April 16, 1986; Karlyn Barker and Sandra Evans, "Snyder Turns to Hollywood for Funds," *The Washington Post,* March 18, 1986.

[54] Joe Pichirallo, "Snyder, 26 Followers Start New Hunger Strike," *The Washington Post,* June 2, 1986; Eve Zibart and Patrice Gaines-Carter, "Reagan Pledges Shelter Funds," *The Washington Post,* June 5, 1986; Milton Coleman, "House Votes to Expedite Shelter Plan," *The Washington Post,* June 6, 1986; Ed Bruske, "Cold Winter Foreseen for D.C. Homeless," *The Washington Post,* November 2, 1986.

Missing the ambitious December deadline, the partially refurbished shelter opened in February 1987 with beds for 600. Barry and Hatfield joined for the ribbon cutting ceremonies. Much work, however, remained to be done. Only half of the residential floors were complete and the clinic and commercial kitchen stood unfinished. In order the make the budget, several pieces of the original design fell by the wayside, most critically the switching out of individual cubicles for six-person bays. All agreed, though, that the new facility was a vast improvement; no longer would hundreds be forced to compete for half a dozen toilets. Unclear where the rest of the funds would come from, Snyder remarked "for us, this project has always been an act of faith." For the Barry administration, completing it soon became an astute economic calculation.[55]

The week after the ribbon cutting, an appeals court upheld a May 1986 ruling reinstating a legal right to shelter, rendering it fully enforceable. At the time, the District spent $11.2 million annually on homeless services, much of which went to maintaining 944 city-operated beds for single adults. The city's estimated homeless population, meanwhile, was 6,500 and growing. Running on an all-volunteer basis, Federal City provided food and shelter for a fraction of the price and with no direct cost to District taxpayers beyond paying the building's utilities. In December, the city agreed to double the federal investment, enabling CCNV to complete the rest of the facility. As part of the deal, a majority of the beds would be converted to bunks, swelling the shelter's population to 1,700 during winter months and further limiting personal space. The comprehensive shelter, which included a 32-bed infirmary and 20-bed detoxification unit alongside space for art therapy and theater, was dedicated in September 1988. With 180,000 square feet and a total cost of $14 million, it was the largest shelter in the nation.[56]

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[55] Karlyn Barker, "Refurnished Shelter for D.C. Homeless Opens," *The Washington Post,* February 20, 1987; Benjamin Forgey, "Halfway Home," *The Washington Post,* March 14, 1987.
[56] Elsa Walsh, "Appeals Court Upholds D.C.'s Shelter Initiative," *The Washington Post,* February 25, 1987; Marcia Slacum Greene, "D.C. Tries to Keep Pace With Homeless Rate," *The Washington Post,* November 15, 1987;

From providing shelter as a spiritual and political act intended to spark the conscience of the city, CCNV evolved into the leading voice demanding a national response to homelessness. Along the way, it also became one of Washington's biggest service providers, performing cheap triage for the Reagan administration's domestic policies and their catastrophic human fallout in the capital. Aware of this contradiction, the group redoubled their efforts to affect wider policy changes in the late 1980s, working first to secure funding for shelter programs nationwide and then to address the dearth of affordable housing that made them necessary in the first place. Yet while demonstrating the peak of its influence in this period, CCNV faced profound setbacks as it was forced to reckon with a troubling reality: the crisis of homelessness was now the everyday.

"A State of Near-Terminal Emergency": Running Campaigns, Running the Shelter

Homelessness advocates and activists from dozens of cities coalesced into a national movement in the final years of the Reagan administration. Playing a principal role in this new coalition, CCNV helped to secure permanent federal funding for emergency shelter programs and ensure a strong show of force demanding an expansion of affordable and public housing. The heights of the Housing Now! campaign included a march on the Capitol attended by an estimated 250,000 people, promising collaborations with other social movement sectors, and a growing emphasis on the self-advocacy of those experiencing homelessness. Seemingly poised to make a breakthrough, the movement instead collapsed in the early 1990s amidst a racialized political and cultural backlash towards the homeless, one which manifest in sharp service cuts and a raft of anti-homeless ordinances in cities across the country. Neither CCNV nor the right to shelter they fought to establish would survive this season of harsh reversals fully intact.[57]

Benjamin Forgey, "Model Havens for the Homeless," *The Washington Post,* December 26, 1987; Ed Bruske, "CCNV Dedicates Shelter," *The Washington Post,* September 23, 1988.

[57] For an early report taking stock of anti-homeless ordinances as they began to spread, see National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty, *Go Directly to Jail: A Report Analyzing Local Anti-Homeless Ordinances* (Washington:

Even as the shelter renovations were still underway, CCNV sought to translate their one-time victory against the Reagan administration into a permanent nationwide advance. Crafted by the National Coalition for the Homeless, the Homeless Persons Survival Act of 1986 prescribed both emergency relief provisions for shelter, food, healthcare, and transitional housing and long-term measures intended to prevent homelessness such as the preservation and expansion of low-income housing and increased protections for those living with chronic mental illness. Sponsored by Rep. Mickey Leland, the bill gained little of the Republican support necessary for its passage due to its $4 billion price tag and the fact that many in Congress continued to view homelessness as a sign of moral failure or personal defect which government largesse would only encourage.[58]

In the next session, the one-time emergency relief provisions were spun out separately with hopes of winning a wider backing. To build support for the act, Fennelly worked the halls of Congress while Snyder and Coalition colleagues camped through the winter outside it. In March, the group sponsored the "Grate American Sleepout," in which participants spent the night unsheltered before a day of lobbying on the bill's behalf. Passing both chambers, the bill was renamed in honor of its chief sponsor, Stewart McKinney, who died in May after contracting pneumonia as part of the Sleepout and facing complications from AIDS. Knowing a veto was likely to be overridden, Reagan unceremoniously signed the McKinney Act late at night when the press had already left. While passed with little fanfare, the act was a significant victory for advocates, recognizing homelessness as an unprecedented crisis, establishing the Inter-agency Council on Homelessness, and appropriating $1 billion over two years for relief programs.[59]

National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty, 1991). For an analysis of these laws that places them within the wider transformation of public space and its role in urban centers, see Don Mitchell, "The Annihilation of Space by Law: The Roots and Implications of Anti-Homeless Laws in the United States," *Antipode* 29, no. 3 (1997), 303-335.

[58] Christine Elwell, "From Political Protest to Bureaucratic Service: The Transformation of Homeless Advocacy in the Nation's Capital and the Eclipse of Political Discourse," diss. (American University, 2008), 161-163.

[59] Margaret Engel, "Speaker Pledges Aid for Homeless," *The Washington Post,* January 11, 1987; Mickey Leland, "A Night on the Grates," *The Washington Post,* March 9, 1987; "President Signs Aid to Homeless Measure," *Los*

A step forward, CCNV, the Coalition, and others also recognized that McKinney was a Band-Aid, one passed within the strict limits of bipartisan compromise and with the potential to institutionalize homelessness if not followed up with more substantive investments focused on prevention. Aiming to secure commitments from Democratic presidential candidates to restore HUD funding for public and affordable housing slashed by Reagan, the Atlanta Task Force for the Homeless, CCNV, and civil rights groups organized a march in the lead up to Super Tuesday. Attend by thousands of homeless self-advocates, the march also drew each of the candidates. That summer, CCNV spearheaded a coordinated multi-city initiative to "Take Off the Boards," with activists squatting in repossessed homes and calling for their turning over to the homeless. In a remix of their Harvest of Shame campaign four years earlier, the group also organized a six-week series of civil disobedience actions under the banner of Housing Now! Noting how the federal housing budget was cut by 75% in the seven years since Reagan took office—and the Pentagon to HUD funding ratio had grown to 44:1—protestors got their point across by erecting chicken shacks on the Capitol lawn, 'evicting' Sen. Jesse Helms from his office, and disrupting Senate proceedings. In the final action the day before the election, 377 were arrested for blocking traffic on Constitution Avenue while calling for the country to wake up to the housing crisis.[60]

While Bush's decisive election signaled a fundamental continuity with the Reagan era, activists hoped that Democratic control of both chambers and a less acrimonious approach from the new administration might provide an opening to address the need for low-income housing. Regrouping in Atlanta, 200 met to strategize next steps, ultimately leading to the formation of

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Angeles Times, July 23, 1987.

[60] Community for Creative Non-Violence, "Housing Now! campaign flyer," 1988, Box 13, Fennelly Papers; Jim Barber, "Homeless March in Atlanta, Berate Candidates," *New Pittsburgh Courier*, March 12, 1988; Robert Reinke, "Activism in the homeless ranks," *The Christian Science Monitor*, July 14, 1988; Lynne Duke, "A Campaign of Civil Disobedience," *The Washington Post,* October 16, 1988; "Spock is Among 377 Arrested at Capitol Rally for the Homeless," *The New York Times*, November 8, 1988.

the Housing Now! coalition. Convened by CCNV, the National Coalition for the Homeless, the National Union of the Homeless, and the National Low-Income Housing Coalition, Housing Now! assembled a broad-based coalition calling for a renewed federal investment in housing, earning the endorsement of over seventy-five organizations. Led principally by Snyder and Fennelly and headquartered at the shelter, Housing Now! marked a qualitative shift for CCNV, replacing symbolic disruption of the status quo with more traditional organizing methods. The group brought on veterans of Jesse Jackson's primary campaigns to staff the coalition while Snyder spent much of the year on the road building support for a national march in October.[61]

As part of the campaign, caravans of the homeless and their supporters marched to the capital from cities across the Eastern seaboard, walking to Washington from as far away as New York. When they arrived they joined an estimated 250,000 marchers, converging on the National Mall to demand action. A powerful exhibition of the depth of local housing movements across the country, the march also revealed tensions within the Housing Now! coalition. Formerly homeless organizers from other cities took contention with Snyder's planned central role in the rally, which they held gave him too much of a spotlight and shifted attention away from those directly affected to their advocates. The march also strained CCNV's hosting capacity, leading to complaints of poor treatment from caravan participants who slept on the shelter's floor and were given peanut butter and jelly sandwiches for their meals. While following up in May 1990 to hammer out a more detailed platform, Housing Now! failed to develop further as a national force for change. With neither party interested in recommitting to public housing construction, the Affordable Housing Act passed later that year bore little resemblance to the group's demands.[62]

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[61] Housing Now!, "A History of Housing Now!," 1989, Box 13, Fennelly Papers; Donna Britt, "The Organizer, In Control and Back in Action," *The Washington Post,* October 7, 1989.
[62] Chris Spolar and Steve Twomey, "Housing Marchers Assembling Here with Focus on 'Affordability Crisis'," *The Washington Post,* October 6, 1989; Allan R. Gold, "Thousands March in Washington in Protest Against

Stymied in their efforts to advance affordable housing nationally, CCNV continued to defend the right to overnight shelter locally. Throughout 1987 and 1988, the number of people living on DC's streets expanded dramatically while shelter capacity lagged far behind. After a temporary truce, the group took the city to court in January 1989, contending that it was out of compliance with the law and needed to open more shelter space immediately. Finding for the homeless plaintiffs backed by CCNV, the judge took it several steps further, mandating new rules on shelter capacity while extending their hours of operation and raising their minimum conditions. Seeking to block the court-ordered improvements, Barry's representatives argued that the District already spent more per capita on homelessness than any other city.[63]

Indeed, the city's budget for homeless services had more than doubled over the previous two years to $27 million, much of which went to housing evicted families in hotels. CCNV and other nonprofit service providers charged that such an approach—spending as much as $3,000 per month per family to keep them in hotels while thousands of units of public housing stood empty—was extraordinarily wasteful, filling the pockets of the politically connected while doing little to address families' long-tern needs. Cited as evidence of corruption, such an approach also left few dollars in the city coffers for supporting homeless single adults. Unconvinced by the Barry administration's arguments, the court forced the city to reach an agreement with CCNV and other advocates on a long-term improvement plan. Eight months later, however, conditions at the city's shelters had little changed. In December, a judge took the extraordinary action of fining the city $30,000 per day for its "flagrant and inexcusable" flouting of the consent decree.[64]

Homelessness," *The New York Times*, October 8, 1989; Biles, *The Fate of Cities*, 293-294; Elwell, "From Political Protest," 166-169; Housing Now!, "The Next Step campaign flyer," 1990, Box 13, Fennelly Papers.

[63] Marcia Slacum Greene, "D.C. Not Pressed to Take Spillover from Shelter," *The Washington Post*, January 5, 1988; Ed Bruske, "City Shelters Jampacked, Snyder Says," *The Washington Post*, December 20, 1988; Barton Gellman, "D.C. Ordered to Speed Changes on Shelters," *The Washington Post*, January 8, 1989.

[64] Sharon LaFraniere, "Auditor Hits Shelter Contract," *The Washington Post*, November 20, 1986; Chris Spolar, "All Back Helping Homeless But Disagree on Where," *The Washington Post*, May 24, 1989; Chris Spolar, "Judge

Accumulating fines provided impetus for city councilmember H.R. Crawford to revisit something he had long sought to do: repeal the right to shelter law. Chair of the human services committee, Crawford was also a former HUD official under Nixon and a landlord known for his stern treatment of his tenants. Citing sharply escalating costs, Crawford called for the budget for homeless services to be cut by $19 million over two years, a move which required the council to weaken shelter provisions significantly. CCNV, hoping to prevent full council approval of the cuts, announced a collective fast. Further upping the stakes, Snyder and group member Shay Elsea went on a total fast, abstaining from both food and water. Councilmembers Crawford and Nadine Winter went on a counterattack, demanding the group appear before a hearing to answer questions on renovation expenses and provide financial statements on their monthly operations—and threatening to stop paying the shelter's $350,000 annual utility bill if they refused to do so. CCNV retorted that they received no direct funding from the city nor were they incorporated as a nonprofit organization, so were under no obligation to provide such information, forwarding with their reply a one-page budget. On March 20th, ten days after the fast began, the council approved the cuts. Winter also passed on voice vote an amendment stating the city would no longer pay the utilities for any shelter whose status prevents the city from applying for federal reimbursements. Defeated, the group quietly ended its fast. It also began the process of applying for 501c3 status. CCNV, it seemed, was no longer in a position to be calling the shots. [65]

Orders D.C. Fined Until Shelters Improved," *The Washington Post*, December 22, 1989; Lois G. Williams, Shelley R. Jackson, Frank R. Trinity, and Susan Schorr, "The District of Columbia's Response to Homelessness: Depending on the Kindness of Strangers," *University of the District of Columbia Law Review* 2, no. 1 (1993), 53-63.

[65] Marcia Slacum Greene, "D.C. Bill to Limit Aid to Homeless May Cripple Right to Shelter Law," *The Washington Post*, May 17, 1987; Betty Medsger, "Law and Order Apartment Manager Being Considered for Housing Post," *The Washington Post*, January 9, 1973; Jill Nelson, "D.C. Panel Slashes Aid to Homeless," *The Washington Post*, March 10, 1990; Carlos Sanchez, "Fasters Protest Plan to Cut D.C. Aid to Homeless," *The Washington Post*, March 11, 1990; Jill Nelson, "Hunger Strike Participant's Condition Worsens," *The Washington Post*, March 17, 1990; H.R. Crawford to Carol Fennelly, March 19, 1990, Box 18, Fennelly Papers; Nadine Winter to Mitch Snyder, March 15, 1990, Box 18, Fennelly Papers; Carol Fennelly to Nadine Winter, March 19, 1990, Box 18, Fennelly Papers; Marcia

Snyder cast the council's actions as part of a "vendetta against the homeless." It is clear, though, that he also saw it as a personal one. The following week, the *Post* ran an article asking if the tide was turning against the activist, referencing both the futile hunger strike and his refusal to allow census takers to enter the shelter. It was time, some homeless advocates in the city argued, for the movement to move on. Others, citing the thousands of signatures CCNV had collected in protest of the cuts and enormous amount the city was saving on 2nd and D, defended him. By this point, Snyder's leadership was being debated internally as well. Younger members questioned the distance between the group's stated commitment to consensus and frequent submission to one man's will in practice. They also charged that Snyder, regularly on the road to raise money, had grown out of touch with the tough realities of Federal City. When he resisted their plan to institute new sanctions related to drug use, wanting to preserve a no-barriers policy, the group collectively overruled him. Harold Moss—one of the group's few Black leaders—also moved to oust Snyder and Fennelly and take over leadership of the shelter. While unsuccessful, the rift between its oldest members revealed the deep fracturing taking place within CCNV as the weight of running the shelter accumulated and longstanding racial tensions burst into the open. Shortly after the *Post* article appeared, Snyder announced that he would begin a sabbatical at a monastery in Virginia, with his return date uncertain.[66]

As the council debated repealing the legal right to shelter, Snyder kept pushing back his planned leave of absence. Those close to him encouraged him to go anyways, but Snyder felt his presence was necessary to waging a successful campaign in support of maintaining the initiative.

Slacum Greene, "D.C. Spending for Homeless Cut by $19 Million," *The Washington Post*, March 21, 1990; Nadine Winter, "…And Accounts," *The Washington Post*, April 15, 1990; Elwell, "From Political Protest," 171-172.

[66] Jill Nelson, "Snyder Alleges 'Vendetta' Against Homeless," *The Washington Post*, March 16, 1990; Chris Spolar, "Could Tide Be Turning Against Mitch Snyder?," *The Washington Post*, March 26, 1990; Ron Richardson, "D.C.'s Lucky it Has Mitch Snyder," *The Washington Post*, April 1, 1990; Elwell, "From Political Protest," 173-175; Chris Spolar and Saundra Torry, "CCNV's Snyder to Take Leave," *The Washington Post*, March 29, 1990.

In late June, the council gave final approval to a bill gutting the right to shelter. The amendment capped shelter funding, the number of days an individual could receive shelter, and the months shelters were open. It also set new eligibility requirements, including requiring drug treatment or community service, and eliminated the minimum conditions prescribed in the previous consent decree. Federal City was not formally part of the city shelter system and thus it was not directly affected by the new rules. At the same time, CCNV regarded the amendment as an assault on everything they had worked tirelessly to establish. Nine days later, Snyder was found dead in his private room at the shelter, having hung himself with an electrical cord. While this confluence of setbacks was seen by many as a contributing factor, Snyder's suicide also brought to light the private anguish beneath his public persona: guilt from abandoning his wife and two sons, a tumultuous relationship with Fennelly in which he had become at turns obsessive and abusive, and ongoing battles with mental health. A devastated Fennelly announced his death on the front steps of the shelter. Officiated by Jesse Jackson, Snyder's funeral drew 3,000 mourners, who marched through the streets behind his casket and vowed to carry on his work. Some would do so that day, sitting in at the District building in protest of the right to shelter's repeal.[67]

Carrying on, a beleaguered CCNV launched the Save Initiative 17 Campaign later that month. Within four weeks it had gathered more than enough signatures to place a referendum on restoring the right to shelter on the November campaign. While raising significant funding and a wide circle of endorsements, the initiative also faced better organized opposition than six years earlier. The city's neighborhood associations and a majority of councilmembers came out against

[67] Nathan McCall and Kent Jenkins Jr., "D.C. Votes to Limit Aid to Homeless," *The Washington Post*, June 13, 1990; "D.C. Council Actions," *The Washington Post*, June 28, 1990; Peter J. Boyer, "The Darkness Within," *Vanity Fair*, November 1990; Williams et al., "The District of Columbia's Response to Homelessness," 65-70; Chris Spolar and Marcia Slacum Greene, "Mitch Snyder Found Hanged in CCNV Shelter," *The Washington Post*, July 6, 1990; Howard Kurz, "Past Catches Up with Hero to Homeless," *Los Angeles Times*, March 17, 1988; Marcia Slacum Greene and Keith Harriston, "3,000 Take to the Streets for Snyder," *The Washington Post*, July 11, 1990.

the restoration measures. So too did the leading candidates to replace Barry as mayor, who had been indicted early that year for drug possession and perjury as part of an FBI sting. As the election drew closer, debate centered on the true driver behind DC's rising homeless population, with the *Post* claiming that rendering overnight shelter an entitlement had also made it an enticement, encouraging people to rely on the government instead of themselves. Advocates responded by pointing out the growing gap between average rents in the city and wages and benefits and by noting that at less than 1% of the budget, shelter programs were hardly the source of the city's financial woes. In November, the campaign to restore the right to shelter lost by two percentage points, with the predominantly white voters of Ward Three voting overwhelmingly to maintain the restrictions. Fought at every turn by the city, the right to shelter had never been practiced as plainly written in the law. It had, however, provided the homeless and their supporters with a critical enforcement tool to ensure that a bare minimum of services were in place. That legal lever was now gone for good.[68]

Whether a CCNV with Mitch Snyder at the helm would have overcome opposition to the referendum or only incurred it further will never be known. What is clear is that the law's repeal and the inability of advocates to rescind it were emblematic of wider shifts beginning to take shape in the perception and treatment of the homeless nationwide. Budgets for shelter programs and social services were slashed in dozens of cities in the early 1990s; they were joined in many by ordinances that criminalized panhandling, loitering, and sleeping in public. Hombs attributed

[68] Marcia Slacum Greene, "Activists Vow to Finish the Job Snyder Began," *The Washington Post*, July 8, 1990; Nancy Lewis, "Petition Drive Underway to Guarantee Shelter," *The Washington Post*, August 1, 1990; Linda Wheeler, "A Test of D.C.'s Policy on the Homeless," *The Washington Post*, November 4, 1990; Editorial, "Vote No on Referendum 005," *The Washington Post*, November 2, 1990; Cushing N. Dolbeare and Susanne Sinclair-Smith, "Restoring the Right to Shelter," *The Washington Post*, November 5, 1990; The Committee to Save Initiative 17, "In November, Vote FOR Referendum 005 pamphlet," 1990, Box 28, Fennelly Papers; Linda Wheeler, "005 Felled By Voters in Ward 3," *The Washington Post*, November 15, 1990; Williams et al., "The District of Columbia's Response to Homelessness," 74-85.

these "reversals of fortune" to the powerlessness many voters felt as they watched government spending on programs soar while the ranks of the homeless continued to climb seemingly unabated. Exhibiting such sentiments, one *Post* columnist announced that he was "walking away from the homeless," convinced that the past ten years had shown "nothing can be done to solve" it and that his time would be better spent on issues where traction might still be gained.[69]

For some influential voices, the source of this incongruity was that 'homelessness' was a misdiagnosis of the main issue at hand. In their missive *A Nation in Denial: The Truth About Homelessness*, Alice S. Baum and Donald W. Burnes asserted that the vast majority who were homeless were so due not to a lack of affordable housing but mental illness, alcoholism, and drug addiction. Guaranteeing shelter rather than demanding rehabilitation only prolonged the problem, in effect enabling people to die. Such arguments were by no means new, bearing more than a passing resemblance to the concept of an "underclass" set apart from the American mainstream by its pathological and socially destructive behaviors. Refined and debated by sociologists and journalists over the previous two decades, the concept had come under fire by the 1990s but retained power in popular usage. As Alice O'Connor has written: "to be underclass in popular usage was to be jobless, welfare dependent, uneducated, drug addicted, criminal, sexually promiscuous, inner city, and overwhelmingly black." Social policy veterans who had worked in the trenches at Samaritan Ministry in Washington, Baum and Burnes lent these racialized assumptions a therapeutic sheen. Their claims found a wide hearing among service providers.[70]

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[69] Mary Ellen Hombs, "Reversals of Fortune: America's Homeless Poor and Their Advocates in the 1990s," New Formations 17 (1992), 119-120. Hombs continued to research homelessness after leaving CCNV in the early 1990s, eventually going on to serve as deputy director of the Interagency Council on Homelessness during the second Bush administration. William Raspberry, "Waking Away from the Homeless," *The Washington Post*, September 6, 1991.
[70] Alice S. Baum and Donald W. Burnes, *A Nation in Denial: The Truth About Homelessness* (Boulder: Westview, 1993), 112-117, 173-174; Alice O'Connor, *Poverty Knowledge: Social Science, Social Policy, and the Poor in Twentieth Century U.S. History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001): 267.

In creating a misleading portrait of the homeless as "people just like us" who were simply "victims of Reaganomics," Baum and Byrnes specifically pointed the blame at Snyder and CCNV, whose permissive New Left ethos they argued prevented an honest assessment of medical and behavioral pathology and the rehabilitative approaches needed to address it. In fact, they contended, the word 'homeless' should not be used at all, as it implied housing as the solution instead of treatment. To an increasingly specialized homeless services industry supported by expanded McKinney funding, Baum and Burnes' arguments were often persuasive. For other advocates and researchers, they were a dangerous restaging of right-wing talking points and a sign of the callous attitude taking hold in unexpected corners. [71]

CCNV fought against these headwinds under Fennelly's leadership, laboring to preserve the budget for homeless services and prevent further shelter closings. When new mayor Sharon Pratt Dixon (later Kelly) cleaved the shelter budget from $23 million to $12 million, members unveiled a 100-foot banner across from the District building decrying the cuts. They sued to prevent the closure of the Blair and Pierce Shelters, opened during Barry's first term at CCNV's insistence. With the right to shelter law no longer applicable, lawyers unsuccessfully pressed their case under the Fair Housing Act. The city closed the shelters along with several others in the fall of 1991, reducing the available city-operated beds by 800. Efforts to open new, smaller shelters faced unyielding opposition as well, with the wealthy Ward Three blocking CCNV's attempts to help open a center for fifty men. While a season of defeats, the group experienced one small victory when a judge ordered the accumulated I-17 noncompliance fines to be used to form an affordable housing trust, providing financing for single room occupancy construction.[72]

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[71] Baum and Burnes, *A Nation in Denial*, 173-174; Mitchell Landberg, "Book Examines Roots of Homelessness," *The Los Angeles Times*, December 19, 1993.

[72] Christine Spolar, "Homeless Rally Delivers a Highflying Message," *The Washington Post*, August 13, 1991; Christine Spolar, "Advocates for Homeless Fight to Keep Shelters," *The Washington Post*, August 8, 1991; Saundra

By 1992, the overwhelming needs of the shelter had forced organizing to largely recede to the background, solidifying a shift in focus years in the making. CCNV's internal dynamics had transformed dramatically as well; with only a remnant of its earlier spiritual and activist community remaining, resident floor staff and young volunteers made up the greater share of the organization. Together, this group of fifty worked to sustain the daily operations of Federal City. Providing beds and meals for 1,400, they received only room and board for their efforts, both a nod to past CCNV tradition and a concession to their austere $365,000 annual budget. As director, Fennelly pushed to upgrade services and reestablish fundraising, implementing changes which both earned her support and engendered conflict. She invited D.C. Central Kitchen to take over the commercial kitchen, improving meals at Federal City and expanding food deliveries to other shelters. A grant was secured to professionally staff the clinic with nurses from Howard, stabilizing the quality of medical care provided on the premises. While improvements, these changes also further removed such programs from resident control, incurring their anger and obstructions. Fennelly also committed to building up a small emergency fund, which meant many immediate needs went unmet despite their merit. Mostly, she spent her days lurching from crisis to crisis, as one problem would subside only for another to immediately take its place.[73]

Efforts to address drug sales and use further escalated tensions within the shelter. From having a no-barriers policy, instance of violence associated with the drug trade led the group to adopt a tougher stance, barring at least three hundred people in the three years since Snyder's passing. Staff were subject to drug testing, a policy which no one liked but that Fennelly believed

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Torry, "Judge Rules D.C. May Continue Closing Shelters," *The Washington Post*, September 6, 1991; Carlos Sanchez and Ruben Castaneda, "CCNV Members Claim NW Center as Shelter," *The Washington Post*, April 5, 1991; Christine Spolar, "Shelter Fines to Finance Apartments," *The Washington Post*, September 24, 1991.

[73] Elwell, "From Political Protest," 269-270; Community for Creative Non-Violence, "Financial Report for the Period of June 30, 1992 – June 30, 1993," Box 10, Fennelly Papers.

was necessary to gain control over an increasingly volatile situation. Matters came to a head in December 1993, when *Sixty Minutes* aired a series of sensationalist reports that featured hidden camera footage of drug sales and recounted accusations of donated food and clothes being resold by staff for personal gain. *Sixty Minutes*, whose 1984 piece on Snyder's hunger strike had helped secure the renovation funding, attributed the chaotic environment to Fennelly's mismanagement. Following its airing, the city opened an investigation into the allegations. Fennelly responded that they had made great strides in addressing such problems and that the alleged offenders were no longer on staff. Yet while criticisms circled about Fennelly's leadership, the larger context of economic deprivation shaping everyday life at the shelter went unquestioned.[74]

In the weeks after the report, residents who were members of the board moved to remove Fennelly and fellow longtime member Cliff Newman from their leadership roles, contending that power within the organization needed to be decentralized and that those who had previously been homeless needed a greater share of control. Keith Mitchell, a former computer programmer who had found himself on the streets before joining CCNV and eventually becoming the area's ANC representative, led the charge. Mitchell and the board expected Fennelly to stay on in a different role and were surprised when she instead announced that after seventeen years she was leaving. Uninterested in a demotion and emotionally and physically exhausted, there was also little left of the rabble-rousing CCNV that had drawn her deep commitment in the first place. Declaring "I am tired, and it is time to get on with my life," Fennelly held her last of many press conferences at the shelter, marking not only the end or her tenure but the end of an era for the organization.[75]

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[74] Martin Weil, "'60 Minutes' Airs Alleged Drug Sales at CCNV Shelter," *The Washington Post*, December 13, 1993; Brooke Masters, "D.C. to Begin Probe of CCNV Shelter," Elwell, "From Political Protest," 271-272. In an ironic twist, the Post editorial board was among the shelter's strongest defenders during the scandal. See Editorial, "CCNV: The Investigation," *The Washington Post*, December 18, 1993.

[75] Brooke A. Masters and Saundra Torry, "Carol Fennelly Ousted from CCNV Leadership Post," *The Washington Post*, January 14, 1994; Rene Sanchez, "A Leader of the Homeless who Walked the Walk," *The Washington Post*, February 14, 1994.

An ending, Fennelly's departure also created space for an exciting new beginning: the direct leadership of Federal City Shelter by the homeless themselves. Consistent with CCNV's philosophy of self-management and mutual aid—and contesting the growing professionalization of homeless services—a new iteration of the organization was coming into being, one that relied on the energy and vision of those closest to the issue. Unfortunately, this new circle would also inherit the problem of providing beds and meals for each of the shelter's 1,400 residents while spending less than one dollar per day per person.

"Acts of Conscience": CCNV and the Contested Terrain of Solidarity

The reversals of the 1990s attested, in their own way, to all that CCNV and others had achieved over the previous decade. In a period when cutting deficits and reassuring creditors were the Barry administration's chief concerns, the group's dramatic acts of protest and battles over the legal right to shelter ensured the plight of the homeless was not forgotten. Facing down the President, CCNV forced the Reagan administration to confront the social crises their policies were helping to produce, compelling the creation and renovation of Federal City Shelter while securing permanent federal funding for shelter programs and support services alongside other activists and advocates. CCNV's interventions undoubtedly saved lives, both preventing deaths from exposure to cold weather and prompting others to open their doors to those on the streets. At the same time, both the long-term nature of these achievements and the paths through which they were reached raise troubling questions about the contradictory role of white left activists within the unfolding of state abandonment and the limits of a politics centered around solidarity.

CCNV's campaigns and research helped create a new common sense concerning the most marginalized members of society, transforming the image of deviant 'street people' deserving of

judgment into that of the 'homeless,' a vulnerable population meriting compassion. Resolute in their refusal of pathologizing frameworks, the group was less consistent regarding paternalism. Particularly in the early years, as they were focused chiefly on raising visibility, CCNV's moral appeals for the government to act relied upon and reinforced depictions of the homeless as destitute outcasts whose "bodies [were] broken, spirits equally disfigured." It was the pain of these "surplus souls in a system firmly rooted in competition and self-interest," Snyder claimed, that compelled him to do something, with their pain moving through him. Though consistent with traditional notions of Christian charity, such sentiments sat uneasily alongside the call for self-representation synonymous with the cultures of the New Left, to say the least.[76]

As the homelessness movement matured—and as being homeless evolved from an increasingly recognized state to a political identity to be claimed—these tensions rose to the fore. Concerns that Snyder was too willing to play the role of white savior were amplified amidst the filming and release of *Samaritan: The Mitch Snyder Story*. Premiering in 1986, the docudrama starred Martin Sheen as Snyder and Cecily Tyson as the homeless woman he befriends his first winter on the streets. While CCNV debated back and forth the decision to "go Hollywood," the $150,000 Snyder earned for the rights was a significant boost to their cash-strapped budget. The tensions would boil over amidst preparations for the Housing Now! march, as Chris Sprowal of the National Union of the Homeless and other formerly homeless organizers took issue with the stage time allotted for Snyder. Sulking, Snyder removed himself from the program. Their conflict reflected the growing rifts between homeless advocates and the homeless themselves, who sought to both reclaim agency and challenge the moderation of many service providers. [77]

[76] Hombs and Snyder, *Homelessness in America*, 4; Fine and Fine, "Mitch Snyder."
[77] Elizabeth Kastor, "Taking on the Grate Society," *The Washington Post*, February 25, 1985; Elizabeth Kastor, "Hollywood Meets the Homeless," *The Washington Post*, January 15, 1986; Boyer, "Darkness Within," 246.

Inescapable in any discussion of paternalism is the question of race. CCNV's inner circle was almost entirely white; a vast majority of those they served were Black. With the exception of Harold Moss, who ultimately broke with the group, this reality remained relatively durable until Fennelly's departure. From its origins as a spiritually inflected intentional community committed to deflection from privilege, the group maintained a tightly held internal culture that resonated with those seeking to reject the trappings of a middle-class lifestyle—and in the position to do so in the first place. While its civil disobedience actions were modeled after those of the civil rights movement, CCNV seemed to go out of its way to end up in jail, an approach that made little sense to those who had already been there and who were unlikely to receive the same treatment white activists were typically afforded. Related, the group's philosophy of non-violence, even at the cost of bodily harm to oneself, was deemed out of touch by many who had known the streets personally. As a result, while shelter residents often took up leadership roles in relation to specific programs, their participation within CCNV itself often remained provisional or limited. The irony of a white-led organization claiming to be an authority on poverty in a majority-Black city was not lost on anyone, with many Black activists maintaining their distance and the Barry administration seeking to exploit citizens' skepticism towards the group. That the Reagan administration was willing to hear out and then partner with the group further demonstrates how white racial identity shaped both the opportunities CCNV was able to take advantage of and how they chose to respond to them.[78]

CCNV's ability to gain a wide hearing, including the imprimatur of the city's Black majority with the passage of Initiative 17, stemmed from not only from their dogged persistence

[78] Rader, *Signal Through the Flames*, 136, 188-190; Durrin, *Promises to Keep*; on the internal cultures and shared beliefs of largely white Christian activist communities during this period, see Barbara Epstein, *Political Protest & Cultural Revolution: Nonviolent Direct Action in the 1970s and 1980s* (Berkeley: California, 1991), 195-226.

and clever manipulation of the press. It was also that they walked the walk. Even as Snyder's motives were questioned and the group's confrontational tactics condemned, none could doubt their commitment. Working grueling schedules under deplorable conditions, CCNV's members provided shelter and furnished meals for hundreds, all while receiving little reward beyond the exhilaration that stemmed from being part of a shared community of resistance. Their hunger strikes and civil disobedience actions, while diminishing in purchase over time and turning some away, revealed their willingness to put their bodies on the line for what they believed in. This radical voluntarism rooted in spiritual convictions got the group far, yet it also had its limitations, placing an upper boundary on what they asked for and what they achieved. Oriented towards individual conversion and immediate action, CCNV often received concessions from officials that bogged them down in providing direct services while deflecting energy from the pursuit of institutional transformation. Their late turn towards mass coalition politics and housing policy through the Housing Now! campaign reflected their own recognition of this problem.

As the experience of CCNV illustrates, grassroots expressions of solidarity could also be incorporated into the larger stratagems of state devolution. CCNV and other activists constructed overnight shelter programs and food distribution systems as emergency responses to the rapidly rising rates of people living on the streets and going hungry in the late 1970 and early 1980s. For them, such acts were forms of mutual aid, measures intended to address immediate needs while gesturing towards the future world they wanted to build and critiquing the cruelty of the present. To the Reagan administration, these efforts were simply local communities and the private sector taking proper responsibility for meeting the needs of the misfortunate. Activists' protests to the contrary, such practices could be consistent with and even conducive of rollbacks in government programs, softening the blows of austerity by taking up some of the slack left from service cuts.

The free labor of CCNV and others in the city also relieved much of the burden of caring for the homeless from the District government, limiting not only the impact of shelter provision on the budget but the sense of responsibility the Barry administration felt for addressing the problem.[79]

Under the subsequent Kelly administration, the city transferred much of the oversight of homeless services to The Community Partnership for the Prevention of Homelessness (TCP). Founded by Oliver Carr—the real estate developer whose hotel provided accommodations when the opening of Federal City Shelter was delayed—TCP was a public-private partnership with a board composed of local business leaders, representatives of service organizations, and elected officials. Backed by HUD, TCP created its own programs alongside its role administering grants to other nonprofit service providers. Commenting on this shift in approach as part of the budget cycle, Kelly replied "There is clearly a push here to involve the private sector more…it's time to try a new way of doing things." As part of this new way of doing things, the city under Kelly's tenure reduced the Department of Human Services workforce by 30%.[80]

Even as CCNV protested these cuts—Fennelly appeared alongside District government workers at rallies against the layoffs—certain of their actions helped to make them possible. CCNV's creation of a quasi-private shelter that operated at arm's length from the city became a model for other nonprofit service providers to follow. Further, their criticisms of the District's

[79] On the role of activism and direct service provision within the post-welfare state transition, see Jennifer R. Wolch, *The Shadow State: Government and Voluntary Sector in Transition* (New York: The Foundation Center, 1990); also Ruth Wilson Gilmore, "In the Shadow of the Shadow State," in INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence, eds. *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded: Beyond the Non-Profit Industrial Complex* (Boston: South End, 2007) 41-52. A longstanding tenet of anarchist thought and practice, mutual aid saw a resurgence in popularity amidst the pandemic as activist groups worked to distribute resources to vulnerable populations in the absence of strong state supports. For a primer on the tactic—one that wrestles with the tensions outlined above even as it is unable to resolve them—see Dean Spade, *Mutual Aid: Building Solidarity During this Crisis (and the Next)* (New York: Verso, 2020).

[80] DeNeen Brown, "D.C. Homeless Initiative Gets a Home," *The Washington Post*, December 16, 1993; Nell Henderson, "Needs vs. Cost: Stricter D.C. Spending Would Cut Many Services," *The Washington Post*, March 21, 1991; Vernon Loeb and Lorraine Adams, "In a System Laden with Security, the Toughest Job is Cutting a Job," *The Washington Post*, March 3, 1995; Elwell, "From Political Protest," 199-210.

handling of the homelessness crisis, while raising legitimate concerns about shelter conditions and improper spending, contributed to a media atmosphere that questioned both the power of government to solve problems generally and the capacity of Black municipal leaders specifically. The expansion of the nonprofit 'shadow state' CCNV's volunteer efforts exemplified imperiled the jobs of Black women in particular, who comprised a significant percentage of public sector employment in the human services field. Turning over social services to nonprofit organizations, business roundtables, and religious groups also often placed them back under white control.[81]

The fight over Federal City Shelter and its future was, among other things, a skirmish between the federal and local governments over which level of the state was responsible for providing citizens' most basic needs, one in which Washington's homeless population served as pawns. In the end, both the Reagan and Barry administrations determined that it was cheaper to pass the problem of providing for a significant portion of DC's most vulnerable residents off to CCNV. A junior partner in this process of devolution, the Barry administration was nonetheless complicit within it. CCNV chose to run the shelter—Snyder's desire for a win after showdowns with Reagan in effect wedded the group to the shelter and it was a consistent critic of the city-operated programs—yet it is also the case that they were caught within a double-bind. With so many people dependent on the shelter's continued existence, how could they just walk away? As crises compounded over the decade, rendering the emergency permanent, systems of provision activists had created as temporary stopgaps became increasingly essential to ongoing survival.

[81] Ruben Castaneda, "Targeted D.C. Workers Protest Cuts," *The Washington Post*, October 11, 1991; Rudolph A. Pyatt, Jr., "Private Sector Can Help Heal D.C.'s Ills," *The Washington Post*, January 1, 1990; Jane Berger, "'There Is Tragedy on Both Sides of the Layoffs:' Privatization and the Urban Crisis in Baltimore," *International Labor and Working-Class History* 71 (Spring 2007): 29-49; Claire Dunning, "New Careers for the Poor: Human Service and the Post-Industrial City," *Journal of Urban History* 44, no. 4 (2018): 669-690.

With activists scrambling to fill the cracks in the partially dismantled welfare state, the exigencies of the present tended to take over. They also encouraged political accommodation, as was the case with the McKinney Act and the decision to excise titles on homelessness prevention and low-income housing production to ensure its passage. Providing critically needed support to shelter programs and enabling the professionalization of service delivery, McKinney also marked the transition to a troubling new norm, one in which homelessness would be managed through a constellation of federally backed local initiatives, many led on the ground by nonprofit service providers. In this sense, the act and its successive renewal in the intervening years have served to institutionalize rather than eliminate homelessness while portraying it as an issue discrete from the sharply unequal distribution of housing, healthcare, and employment in the United States. [82]

While CCNV's horizon of possibility was inevitably shaped by the historical period of retrenchment it inhabited—as well as its own racial occlusions—it also fought strenuously against the era's constrictions. For two and a half decades, its members not only decried the rise of homelessness but insisted that housing was a fundamental human right which should not be contingent on one's ability to pay rent or conform to behavioral norms. In so doing, they laid the groundwork for the Housing First model, which insists that stable housing forms a prerequisite to other supportive services. CCNV's work through the Housing Now! coalition also pointed to the need to go beyond such models through profoundly reshaping US housing policy and its aims.[83]

Soldiering On at 2nd and D: The Persistence of Federal City Shelter

CCNV began its second life under the direction of shelter residents in 1994 amidst high hopes. Many advocates also had their concerns, as the shelter continued to have few supports,

[82] On the role of the McKinney-Vento Act within the consolidation of the homeless services industry, see Craig Willse, *The Value of Homelessness: Managing Surplus Life in the United States* (Minneapolis: Minnesota, 2015).
[83] On the Housing First model, see Deborah K. Padgett, Benjamin F. Henwood, and Sam J. Tsemberis, *Housing First: Ending Homelessness, Transforming Systems, and Changing Lives* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

little oversight, and an enormous task. Becoming the new director, Mitchell announced plans to apply for HUD funding for the first time, soon receiving a $1.2 million sub-grant to create a case management system and bring on a team of social workers. While the case management staff would be paid through the grant, resident staff would continue as unpaid volunteers. Trouble began soon after the money arrived. Diverting funds to cover unmet operating costs, Mitchell missed multiple staff payrolls and failed to get the computerized case management system up and running. He also spent a significant amount of money on himself. HUD raided CCNV's offices in 1996, with an auditor concluding that over $400,000 was improperly spent, at least $65,000 of which Mitchell would be convicted of embezzling. News coverage of the corruption scandal rarely pointed out, however, that Mitchell and the majority of staff received no salaries. Taking a hit in the press, CCNV was also barred from receiving any further federal funding.[84]

As other programs diversified in pursuit of federal funds and foundation grants dedicated to specific populations (families, veterans, people with HIV/AIDS, people in recovery), 2nd and D solidified its reputation as the place of last resort for those who either could not or refused to conform to these categories. Subsisting on small-dollar donations from longtime supporters and the energies of residents and volunteers, Federal City was chaotic and violent at times. It was also the closest thing to home for nearly 1,400 people, including a growing number of families with nowhere else to go. While councilmembers and other officials made calls for intervention, the arrangement saved the city over $10 million per year and no mayoral administrations were interested in incurring either the cost of operating the shelter or responsibility for the residents. [85]

[84] Rene Sanchez, "A New Broom at CCNV Shelter," *The Washington Post*, June 6, 1994; Robert E. Pierre and Hamil R. Harris, "HUD Seizes Records From CCNV Shelter," *The Washington Post*, November 1, 1996; Vernon Loeb, "CCNV Misused $407,000 in Federal Funds, Audit Finds," *The Washington Post*, January 17, 1997; Bill Miller, "Ex-Shelter Director Pleads Guilty to Taking Funds," *The Washington Post*, March 6, 1998.
[85] Elwell, "From Political Protest," 275-276; Theola S. Labbe, "City to Move families Out of NW Shelter," *The Washington Post*, January 13, 2005; Jason Cherkis, "Helter Shelter," Washington City Paper, February 25, 2000.

In 1993, The House of Representatives returned to the basement of Federal City Shelter for another hearing on "Homelessness in America." Testifying before the Subcommittee on Housing and Community Development, Fennelly offered the following observation:

> If not for the help and support of this subcommittee, our dream for a model shelter would never have seen the light of day. We thank you for that, but now it's time to close this place down. It is disgraceful and immoral that in the richest and most technologically advanced nation the world has ever known that this facility exists. That it has existed for over a decade is indefensible.

Thirty years after her testimony, Federal City Shelter soldiers on, a living monument to CCNV's struggle to secure the most basic of rights and the state's abdication of its responsibility.[86]

[86] Carol Fennelly, quote from: U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs: Hearings on Homelessness in America, 103th Cong., 1st. sess., 1993, 41.

Epilogue

In 1994, Marion Barry accomplished an astonishing comeback, defeating Kelly and council member John Ray in the Democratic mayoral primary. Overcoming a felony conviction and the strongest Republican showing in a general election since the advent of home rule, support for Barry among the city's Black voters secured both his political return and the honorific title of 'Mayor for Life.' The wider Barry era, however, was coming to an end. The compounding effects of the city's limited taxing and statutory authority, steady population decline, growing social needs, and at times shortsighted fiscal decisions had led to ballooning budget deficits. The Kelly administration's cuts to the municipal workforce and social services did little to abate these trends, due largely to the unfunded pension obligation the District inherited from the federal government as part of the transition to home rule. With the city facing a projected $722 million shortfall, Moody's Investor Service lowered DC's bond rating to 'junk' status in February 1995, hampering its ability to borrow money and leaving the city teetering on the edge of bankruptcy.[1]

The same night that Barry retook the mayoralty, Republicans scored victories across the nation, claiming concurrent control of the House and Senate for the first time in over forty years. Responding to the District's fiscal crisis—and their profound distaste for Barry—Congress and the Clinton administration moved to institute a Financial Control Board, doing so in April. While the efforts of non-voting delegate Eleanor Holmes Norton thwarted calls to dismantle home rule altogether and ensured individuals sympathetic to self-government were appointed to the Control Board, the legislation struck a profound blow to the District's autonomy. The Control Board was given authority over all budgets, contracts, and plans, enjoying wide powers to make cuts as they

[1] Michael K. Fauntroy, *Home Rule or House Rule? Congress and the Erosion of Local Government in the District of Columbia* (Lanham: University Press of America, 2003): 129-165. On municipal debt as a form of racial capitalist governance, see Destin Jenkins, *The Bonds of Inequality: Debt and the Making of the American City* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021).

saw necessary. It was to remain in place until the city's bond rating improved and it achieved four consecutive balanced budgets. Six out of ten Black Washingtonians perceived the act as a hostile takeover from a conservative white Congress seeking to impose its agenda on the city. The establishment of charter schools the following year further reinforced this assumption. [2]

Congress soon learned that balancing the District's budget was easier said than done, and that longstanding city complaints about being saddled with federal debt while being granted few tools for tackling it were in fact an accurate assessment of the situation. The city's unique status, requiring it to take on multiple expenses typically carried at the state level, imposed further constraints not faced by most municipalities. The 1997 Revitalization Act assumed the city's outstanding pension liability, allowed the District to borrow directly from the Federal Treasury, reduced the proportion of its Medicaid match, and funded its courts and prisons in exchange for numerous concessions. The annual payment to DC to compensate for the federal government's significant land use and share of city services was phased out. The city also lost control over much of its criminal justice system and was forced to adopt tougher sentencing measures. Finally, the act increased the power of the Control Board, granting them managerial oversight over most city agencies and reducing the mayor and city council to chiefly ceremonial roles. The outrage that this further diminution of the city's powers spurred among District residents helped to reignite the flagging movement for DC statehood, leading to the formation of the Stand Up! for Democracy in D.C. Coalition and a revitalization of the now D.C. Statehood Green Party.[3]

The original act authorizing the Control Board further mandated the creation of a new office: Chief Financial Officer (CFO). Nominated by the mayor, the CFO nevertheless operated

[2] Asch and Musgrove, *Chocolate City*, 429-432; Yolanda Woodlee and Richard Morin, "D.C. Residents See a Future at Risk," *The Washington Post*, March 5, 1995.
[3] Fauntroy, *Home Rule or House Rule?*, 183-19; Musgrove, ""Statehood is Far More Difficult"," 12.

largely independently of the administration while maintaining broad discretion over the city's financial operations. Barry's pick for CFO, Anthony Williams, was an awkward technocrat new to the city whom the mayor assumed to have no political ambitions. Once in the role, however, Williams began cultivating his public persona, working closely with the Control Board and Congress while touting his distance from the administration. When a weakened Barry decided not to seek reelection in 1998, Williams quickly entered the race, winning first the Democratic primary and then the election primarily with the backing of white and middle-class Black voters. A satisfied Control Board announced they would relinquish managerial oversight effective with Williams' swearing-in. Near the end of his first term the city's fourth year of solid books enabled the Control Board to wind down. To some observers, it comprised a stunning turnaround.[4]

For other residents of the city, the Control Board era—and the fundamental continuity Williams maintained with it once it concluded—represented significant loss. Staff reductions at city agencies, the privatization of multiple municipal services, the shuttering of neighborhood schools, the closing of DC's only public hospital: the impacts of these policy decisions were neither race-neutral nor evenly borne. Elected to a second term, in 2003 Williams announced the ambitious goal of drawing 100,000 new middle- and upper-income residents to the city over the following decade, contending this was the best path to securing the District's financial future. To many Black Washingtonians, Williams' proposal resembled the long-rumored plan to displace Black residents from the city, deconcentrate Black political power, and reassert white control over the capital. The painful irony was that a Black mayor was at the helm of these changes.[5]

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[4] Asch and Musgrove, *Chocolate City*, 435-438; Howard Schneider and David A. Vise, "Financial Chief Shows He's Got Bark—and Bite," *The Washington Post*, March 24, 1996; Spencer S. Hsu, "District Completes Its Fiscal Comeback," *The Washington Post*, January 30, 2001.

[5] Asch and Musgrove, *Chocolate City*, 435-438. On DC housing organizer Yulanda Ward's critique of Black spatial deconcentration through housing policy—a materialist analysis that takes the critique of power relations expressed within Black intramural discussions of "The Plan" seriously—see Yulanda Ward, "Spatial Deconcentration in D.C." *Midnight Notes* 4 (1981): 28-31; also Ndubuizu, "In the State's Shadow of Fair Housing," 1559-1560.

Economic processes and cultural shifts underwriting a broader return to cities by capital and people in the 2000s helped to render Williams' vision a reality, although on a slightly slower timetable than he originally conceived. In addition, the dramatic expansion of national security and defense spending in the wake of the September 11 attacks and ill-conceived War on Terror that followed brought thousands of jobs to the region and many new residents to the city. Both the Williams administration and subsequent Fenty administration worked hard to court private redevelopment by expanding subsidies, footing the bill for infrastructural improvements, and giving away more than $200 million in public-owned land. Vowing to spread around the city's newfound surpluses after years of criticism that he neglected longtime and low-income Black Washingtonians, the Williams administration launched the New Communities Initiative in 2005. Based on the federal HOPE VI program, the initiative aimed to replace public housing projects and project-based Section 8 housing left dilapidated from years of underfunding and neglect with privately developed mixed-income neighborhoods. Founded on the principles of one-for-one replacement, building first to minimize displacement, and the ability of residents to return, the initiative proved much more successful at razing entire communities than it did rebuilding them. It also demonstrated the fragility of seeking to produce affordable housing through market tools, as the 2008 financial crisis sharply reduced Low Income Housing Tax Credit investment.[6]

Nonprofit community development and direct service organizations that arose in response to the crises of the 1970-80s became increasingly sophisticated advocates throughout the 1990-2000s, forming new coalitions to push back against budget cuts and ensure vital programs were

[6] Hyra, *Race, Class and Politics in the Cappuccino City*, 47-71; Patrick Madden, "Million-Dollar Properties, $1 Deals," *WAMU*, May 21, 2013, https://wamu.org/story/13/05/21/million_dollar_properties_1_deals/; Jenny Gathright, "More than a Decade Later, Some Former D.C. Public Housing Residents Worry If They'll Ever Return," *WAMU*, April 8, 2019, https://wamu.org/story/19/04/08/more-than-a-decade-later-some-former-d-c-public-housing-residents-worry-if-theyll-ever-return/. On the politics of privately developed affordable housing and the mixed-income redevelopment of public housing projects, see John Arena, *Driven from New Orleans: How Nonprofits Betray Public Housing and Promote Privatization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012).

funded. While calling for increased investment in social services and providing a bulwark against further austerity, alliances such as the Fair Budget Coalition (established 1994) and the Coalition for Nonprofit Housing & Economic Development (established 2000) also at times reflected what one scholar described as "the hegemony of privatism" in the city. As nonprofit service providers, the budgetary interests they defended were not only those of low-income residents but also their own; taking on a greater share of city contracts, 501c3s and CDCs also stood to lose more, often leading them to moderate their demands and avoid direct conflict with elected officials.[7]

Throughout the first decade of the new millennium the number of Black residents in the District declined in near inverse relationship to the expansion of its white population, with the soaring cost of living precipitating the loss of a Black statistical majority by 2011. The inability of the community development and nonprofit direct service sectors to pose a political challenge to residential displacement and its racialized contours—and their structural entanglements with these processes—in turn facilitated the rise of new grassroots organizations in the 2000s. Formed in 2003, Empower DC has fought to prevent the transformation of shuttered schools into luxury condominiums in Ivy City and other northeast neighborhoods and worked alongside Barry Farm residents resisting their displacement due to the New Communities Initiative. Emerging from Manna CDC in 2006, ONE DC (Organizing Neighborhood Equity) pursued a cooperative development vision for Shaw and the wider city, supporting gentrification-threatened tenants in purchasing their buildings and seeding worker-owned initiatives. Created by unhoused residents in 2008, the People for Fairness Coalition has worked to prevent shelter closings, expand the rights of the homeless, and ensure that they are remembered through public vigils honoring those

[7] Stephen J. McGovern, *The Politics of Downtown Development: Dynamic Political Cultures in San Francisco and Washington, D.C.* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1998): 248-258; Carol D. Leonnig, "Forum Calls on Fenty to Remember Needy," *The Washington Post*, March 25, 2007; Nikita Stewart, "Help for Low-Income Residents Sought," *The Washington Post*, April 24, 2008.

who died without shelter. While inheriting the 501c3 model and its limitations, these and other organizations helped to inaugurate a new era of bold, Black-led protest in the city. The visions of landed self-determination they put forward also recalled the work of those who came before.[8]

[8] Carol Morello and Dan Keating, "Number of Black D.C. Residents Plummets as Majority Status Slips Away," *The Washington Post*, March 24, 2011; Nikita Stewart, Taking a Step to Stay in Their NE Neighborhood," June 4, 2006; Dominic Moulden, interview by Samir Meghelli, July 20, 2016, A Right to the City Exhibition Records, Smithsonian Anacostia Community Museum, https://sova.si.edu/details/ACMA.03-119?t=W&q=moulden#ref28; Brigid Schulte, "'Nobody Should be Left Out Here'," *The Washington Post*, December 21, 2013. Washington Innercity Self Help (WISH), formed in the late 1970s and lasting into the early 2000s, formed a vital link between these two eras, continuing to organize tenants alongside its work in affordable housing development. One of its key staff members Linda Leaks was also a co-founder of Empower DC. On WISH, see Huron, "Struggling for Housing."

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