



## Washington History in the Classroom

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**“Washington History** magazine is an essential teaching tool,” says Bill Stevens, a D.C. public charter school teacher. “In the 19 years I’ve been teaching D.C. history to high school students, my scholars have used *Washington History* to investigate their neighborhoods, compete in National History Day, and write plays based on historical characters. They’ve grappled with concepts such as compensated emancipation, the 1919 riots, school integration, and the evolution of the built environment of Washington, D.C. **I could not teach courses on Washington, D.C. history without *Washington History*.**”



*Bill Stevens engages with his SEED Public Charter School students in the Historical Society’s Kiplinger Research Library, 2016.*

**Washington History** is the only scholarly journal devoted exclusively to the history of our nation’s capital. It succeeds the *Records of the Columbia Historical Society*, first published in 1897. *Washington History* is filled with scholarly articles, reviews, and a rich array of images and is written and edited by distinguished historians and journalists. **Washington History** authors explore D.C. from the earliest days of the city to 20 years ago, covering neighborhoods, heroes and she-roes, businesses, health, arts and culture, architecture, immigration, city planning, and compelling issues that unite us and divide us.

The full runs of *Washington History* (1989-present) and its predecessor publication the *Records of the Columbia Historical Society* (1897-1988) are available through JSTOR, an online archive to which many institutions subscribe. It’s easy to [set up a personal JSTOR account](#), which allows for free online reading of six articles per month in any of their journals, or join the Historical Society at the [Membership Plus](#) level for unlimited free access to our publications.



Alexander "Boss" Shepherd comes home to a laurel wreath from the *Evening Star* and its cartoonist, George Yost Coffin, 1887. Shepherd's service in the territorial government from 1871 to 1874 was highly controversial. He was credited with rehabilitating the city that was badly battered by the Civil War and blamed for overspending his budget, leading Congress to dissolve the territorial government and impose appointed commissioners. In October 1887 Shepherd returned from working in Mexico and was greeted with parades and celebrations in his honor. This cartoon is one of hundreds of graphic images of the city's tumultuous political history that are held in the Washingtoniana Division of the D.C. Public Library. All illustrations appear, courtesy, Washingtoniana Division, D.C. Public Library.

# The Art of D.C. Politics

## Broadsides, Banners, And Bumper Stickers

by Faye P. Haskins

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**H**ow do we as a free people make our political will known? Since the founding of our nation, Americans have exercised their cherished right to free speech by expressing their deepest convictions via simple slogans and symbols. “No Taxation without Representation” was a popular and concise rallying cry for American rebels in the eighteenth century, as was “Hell, no, we won’t go!” for Vietnam War protesters in the twentieth. As Keith Melder writes in *Hail to the Candidate*, presidential campaign issues are “often complicated, controversial, and divisive, whereas political objects are intended to simplify, to soothe” and translate issues into “celebration, humor, loyalty, imagery, or attack.” As a community devoted to using political means for change, Washington, D.C.’s residents and artists have created a wealth of political art and memorabilia with their own unique symbols and ideas.<sup>1</sup>

The Washingtoniana Division of the D.C. Public Library is the repository for much of this art, including bumper stickers, picket signs, posters, cartoons, flyers, banners, hats, campaign buttons, and other visuals. The District’s 200 years of struggle for self-determination and local political control sparked much of this political expression. So did the fight for D.C. statehood and opposition to freeway construction. Along the way, talented artists and writers lent their pens and brushes to these causes. In the following pages is a sampler of the art of D.C. politics.

**I**n order to appreciate the context for much of this collection, a bit of background on D.C. politics is helpful. Since the District of Columbia was incorporated in 1802, it has experienced varying degrees and periods of local self-government, yet it has always ultimately been controlled by Congress and/or the Executive Branch. The city’s original charter called for an elected city council and a presidentially appointed mayor. In 1812 Congress granted

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*Notes begin on page 91.*

the council the right to elect the District's mayor, and then in 1820 changed the District's charter to allow citizens to elect their mayor directly. Local self-government continued until 1871 when Congress revoked the charters of the District of Columbia and Georgetown and imposed a territorial form of government with a presidentially appointed governor and council, an elected House of Delegates, and an elected non-voting delegate to the House of Representatives. In 1874 Congress replaced this partially elected government with a three-member Board of Commissioners appointed by the president. For the next century, the Commissioners governed the city.<sup>2</sup>

As an appointed rather than elected body, the Commissioners did not answer to D.C. residents. Instead, their peers, including the Washington Board of Trade and other powerful banking, real estate, and business interests had the most influence on their decisions. The Board of Trade, charged Senator Estes Kefauver in 1951, was a "little oligarchy [that] has been the invisible government . . . for many years." Beginning in 1917, when the Board of Trade established its D.C. Committee, chaired by *Evening Star* Editor Theodore Noyes, the board and the newspaper pressed hard both on Capitol Hill and in print for national representation but opposed home rule. Beginning in the 1940s, a group of influential organizations such as the *Washington Post* under Publisher Philip Graham, the Maryland-District of Columbia CIO, and the D.C. League of Women Voters began supporting home rule in addition to national representation. But they were in the minority for most of the period before World War II.<sup>3</sup>

After World War II the balance of power began a gradual shift from anti-home rule business interests to pro-home rule organizations and activists. The Republican and Democratic national platforms supported D.C. suffrage and home rule beginning in the 1940s. But home rule did not have broad support in Congress. South Carolina Representative John McMillan and Virginia Senator Robert Byrd were two of the most insistent anti-home rule legislators, and the House Committee on the District of Columbia during this period was dominated by racist southerners intent on keeping the increasingly black city powerless. Liberal members of Congress, such as Senators James Auchincloss of New Jersey and Kefauver of Tennessee, introduced home rule bills that finally reached the House floor in 1949, and Presidents Eisenhower and Kennedy supported the cause. Yet while a total of six home rule bills were introduced between 1949 and 1965, none made it out of the House; five died in the powerful House District Committee.<sup>4</sup>

In 1957 Washington became the nation's first majority black city. At the same time, the Civil Rights movement was gaining momentum, so the injustice of a city with a black majority that was denied local democracy took on new meaning. As early as 1946 biracial groups of Washingtonians began meeting in each other's homes to discuss tactics for gaining self-government. During the 1960s, the campaign left the drawing room for the streets. A succession of activist leaders, including Marion Barry and Julius Hobson, became angry and visible, shaking the status quo and inspiring citizens to take to the sidewalks and to the hearing rooms. By 1967, after failing to persuade members of key House committees that the city deserved to govern itself, President Lyndon Johnson set up a new system consisting of a presidentially appointed City Council and mayor/commissioner, paving the way for an elected city school board (1968), an elected non-voting D.C. delegate to Congress (1970), and an elected mayor and City Council (1973). Still, the Congress retained veto power over city legislation, controlled its budget, police force, and court system, and refused to give citizens voting representation in Congress. Thus, the struggle for autonomy has played itself out graphically and in the courts of law and public opinion for more than 200 years.

Some of the art of the struggle included here was signed and even published; some has come to us from anonymous creators. The three major known artists are profiled as their works are introduced.

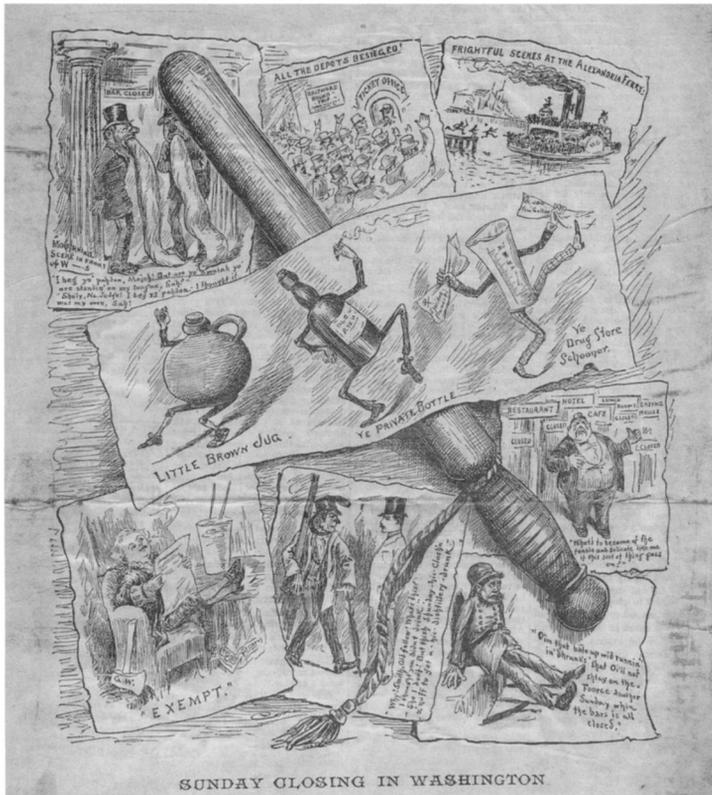
The earliest of the political commentators is George Yost Coffin. Working in the late nineteenth century, his often complex drawings include both classical allusions and everyday imagery. The Washingtoniana Division holds a collection of news clippings of his published work (1885 to 1891) that was assembled by Coffin during his lifetime. Like many of his contemporaries, Coffin chose gentle humor over bombast to express his political views.

Coffin was born in Pottstown, Pennsylvania, on March 30, 1850, but grew up in Washington after moving here with his parents at the age of eight. As a college student, Coffin studied law at Columbian College, but his favorite pastime was sketching. In 1873 he graduated with a law degree from Columbian College (now George Washington University). A year before his graduation, he became a clerk at the Treasury Department, a position he held until his death in 1896, even as he worked as an artist for others. In the mid-1870s, Coffin was hired to draw for the *Illustrated Washington Chronicle*, the city's first illustrated weekly, which published for just a few months. He then worked as a free lance for a number of publications, including *Harper's Illustrated*, *Puck*, *Evening Star*, *Critic*, *Sunday Herald*, *Washington Post*, *National Republican*, and *National Tribune*. In 1883 *The Hatchet*, a Washington weekly, began publication and engaged Coffin as its cartoonist. His cartoons covered local and national political issues of the late nineteenth century, including the administration of Grover Cleveland, a series illustrating civil war stories, civil service reform, and the ills of the city's commissioner form of government. At the end of his career, Coffin contributed exclusively to the *Washington Post* and submitted his last illustration just ten days before his death. The papers of George Y. Coffin, including original cartoons, are deposited at George Washington University's Gelman Library.<sup>5</sup>



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Smarting from the city's dependence on congressional handouts, Coffin rendered D.C. as Lazarus begging for crumbs from the rich men's (Congress's) table at appropriation time, 1888. Coffin Collection.



Coffin comments on the hardships imposed on the populace when D.C. Commissioners suddenly directed District police to enforce existing blue laws, 1887. Coffin Collection.

Clyfford K. Berryman, who followed Coffin as the *Post's* chief cartoonist in 1896, became one of the most respected visual commentators of the twentieth century. A self-taught artist, Berryman came to Washington in 1886 from Versailles, Kentucky, where he was born on April 2, 1869, the tenth among eleven children. Upon arriving in Washington, he worked first as a draftsman in the Patent Office until 1891 and then became a free-lance illustrator. He honed his talents as a cartoonist at the *Washington Post* and then left to join the staff of the *Evening Star* in 1907, where he remained until his death on December 11, 1949. At the *Star* Berryman gained a national reputation with his coverage of international and national political topics. His trademark became the teddy bear, which he originally drew as a likeness of Teddy Roosevelt after the president refused to kill a bear on a hunting trip. Among his many honors, Berryman won the Pulitzer Prize in 1944 for his August 28, 1943, cartoon on manpower mobilization, which showed President Franklin Roosevelt at the helm of a rowboat under the title, "But Where is the Boat Going?"<sup>6</sup>

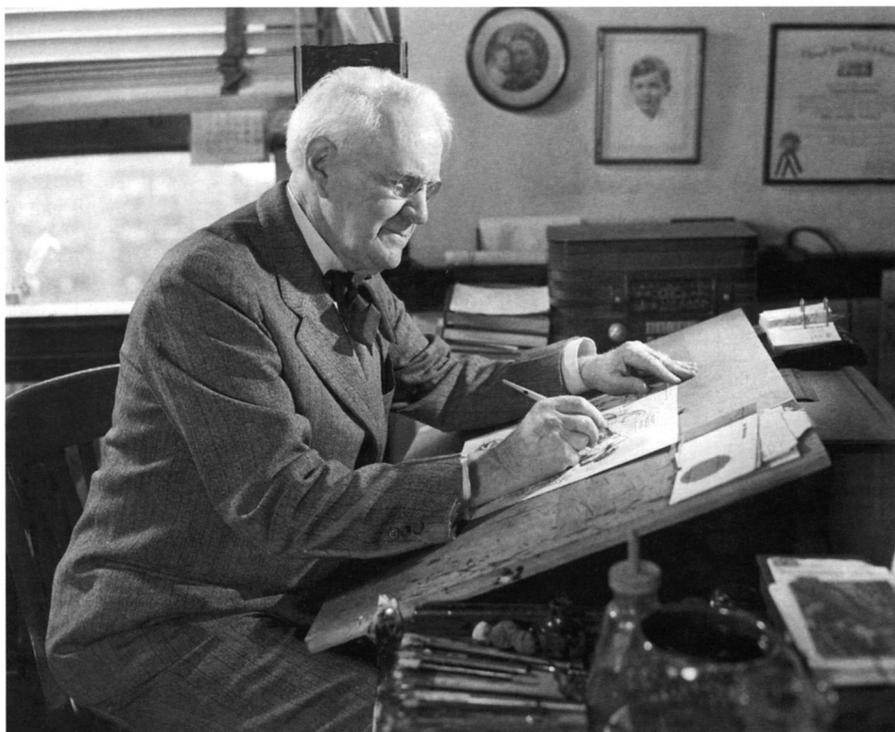
As a long-time District resident, Berryman used his prodigious talents to produce cartoons appealing for D.C. suffrage and protesting against congressional neglect and high taxes. His many drawings of patriots exclaiming "No Taxation without Representation!" and throwing tea overboard became familiar symbols in campaigns for D.C. voting rights. After his death, his daughter Florence Berryman donated the major portion of Berryman's work on national and international issues to the Library of Congress. Original Berryman cartoons are also filed at the National Archives, the British Museum, the Huntington Library, the Franklin Delano Roosevelt Presidential Library, the University of Texas, the University of Missouri, the University of Idaho, the New York Public Library, and in private collections. Cartoons about the District of Columbia are found in the Washingtoniana Division, Tudor Place, and The Historical Society of Washington, D.C.<sup>7</sup>



Washington, D.C., usually personified as a kindly colonial figure in Berryman cartoons, registers his annoyance that Congress has closed the Tidal Basin Beach, 1925. Congress shut down the popular whites-only playground, where the Jefferson Memorial now stands, in part because the Public Health Service claimed the Potomac was contaminated. The real reason, many argued, was that black activists had succeeded in forcing the city to add a "colored" bathing beach nearby, and some senators opposed having a facility for African Americans along the Potomac. Clifford K. Berryman Cartoon Collection.

Uncle Sam, the symbol of American rights, cheers on "Washington" as he rallies citizens to vote in an unofficial plebiscite, 1946. Only 18 percent of the population cast ballots on whether Washingtonians should elect their own city government as well as vote for U.S. president and local congressional representatives. Of those voting, 70 percent answered "yes" to home rule and 80 percent affirmed their desire for voting rights. Berryman Collection.

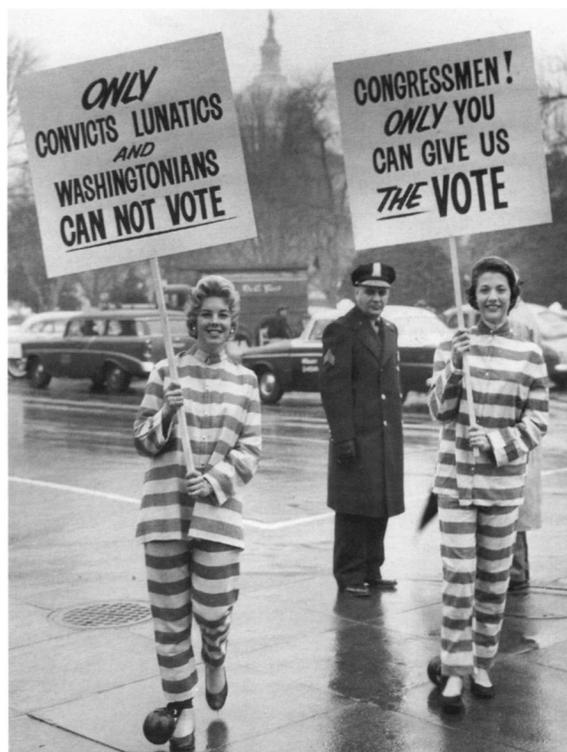




Clifford Berryman, at work, ca. 1940s. Evening Star Collection, © Washington Post Co.

**I**n 1953, the Home Rule Committee comprised hundreds of members, primarily civic-minded attorneys including John Pickering, Alexander Haws, Sturgis Warner, Gerhard Gesell, and Lloyd Cutler as well as Democratic party activist Daisy Harriman. Post Publisher Graham, investment banker J. Clifford Folger, and art collector Duncan Phillips worked on the committee as well. Members called on Congress, wrote letters to newspaper editors, and picketed, lobbied, and testified at congressional hearings in support of home rule bills. The Home Rule Committee continued to exist through the 1970s, but beginning in the late 1960s, it took a back seat to more militant organizations, steeped in the tactics of civil rights organizing.<sup>8</sup>

*Home Rule Committee pickets dressed as convicts demonstrate near the Capitol in favor of a House resolution calling for an appointed governor, local elected legislature, and a non-voting delegate to Congress, 1959. ESC, © WP.*



In 1965 a young Marion Barry arrived in Washington to head the D.C. chapter of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee. Barry joined forces with an unlikely partner, L.D. Pratt, a white middle-aged salesman and self-styled radical economist. They organized a one-day bus boycott on January 24, 1966, to protest a five-cent bus fare hike proposal pending before the Metropolitan Area Transit Commission. O. Roy Chalk, the unpopular private owner of D.C. Transit, had requested the hike in December 1965. Drawing on the tactics of the successful Montgomery, Alabama, bus boycott of 1955, and sensing the opportunity to create a viable protest movement, Barry and Pratt appealed to the mostly poor and black bus riders to join the boycott. SNCC members recruited volunteers to chauffeur bus riders. On January 28, 1966, two days after the boycott began, the Transit Commission denied D.C. Transit the fare hike, and the boycotters declared victory. (It would be only temporary, however, as the commission allowed Chalk subsequent fare increases.)<sup>9</sup>

**Stop O. Roy Chalk's Highway Robbery!**



**JOIN THE ONE-DAY BUS BOYCOTT MON. DEC. 2**

D.C. Transit has stuck up the riders for 3¢ more and higher tokens. Owner Chalk is preparing to raise fares to 35¢, eliminate tokens, and charge 5¢ for transfers. Enough is enough! The rider's cup runneth over!

Many organizations have joined with the Emergency Committee on the Transportation Crisis to organize a one-day boycott of D.C. Transit for the following demands:

- 1** A 15¢ FARE FOR D.C. RIDERS! The bus company's profits come from the pockets of the poor and Black riders who make up for the bus-operating losses in Md. and Va.
- 2** A \$1.50 WEEKLY PASS! This would stop the vicious circle of higher fares and fewer riders. It would mean lower fares, more riders, speedier service and end scrip.
- 3** FREE RIDES FOR D.C. SCHOOL CHILDREN! School children in the rich Md. and Va. suburbs ride free on school buses. Why should poor Black pupils pay D.C. Transit?
- 4** BLACK REPRESENTATION ON THE TRANSIT COMMISSION! Replace the present lily-white, 3-man stooge commission (one each from D.C., Va., and Md.) with a D.C.-based, Black majority transit commission which would more truly represent the majority of transit riders.
- 5** ERASE CHALK! Put the buses under municipal ownership and run it as a public service. Then use the \$90-10 gas tax money to improve service and keep fares low instead of building freeways for the suburbanites.

Help organize and mobilize private cars, car pools, church buses to get people to-and-from their jobs, Mon. Dec. 2.

**Bus Boycott Office - Nash Methodist Church**  
RHODE ISLAND AVE., LINCOLN ROAD, & U ST. N.E.  
phone: 832-8346 (or 832-5366)

Activities for TRANSPORTATION CRISIS WEEK:

- Monday, Dec. 2  
Bus Boycott
- D.C. CITY COUNCIL'S HEARINGS ON FREEWAYS
- Tuesday, Dec. 3  
Western High School 2-5:30 pm  
35th & R St. NW  
Hine Jr. High 7:30-10:30 pm  
7th & C St. SE
- Wednesday, Dec. 4  
District Bldg. Room 500  
13½ & E St. NW 2-5:30 pm  
Kelly-Miller Jr. High  
49th & Brook NE 7:30-10:30

To get on the list to testify, phone 638-2223

*"Protest the spending of hundreds of millions of dollars for unwanted freeways for the few - and nothing for mass transit for the many!"*

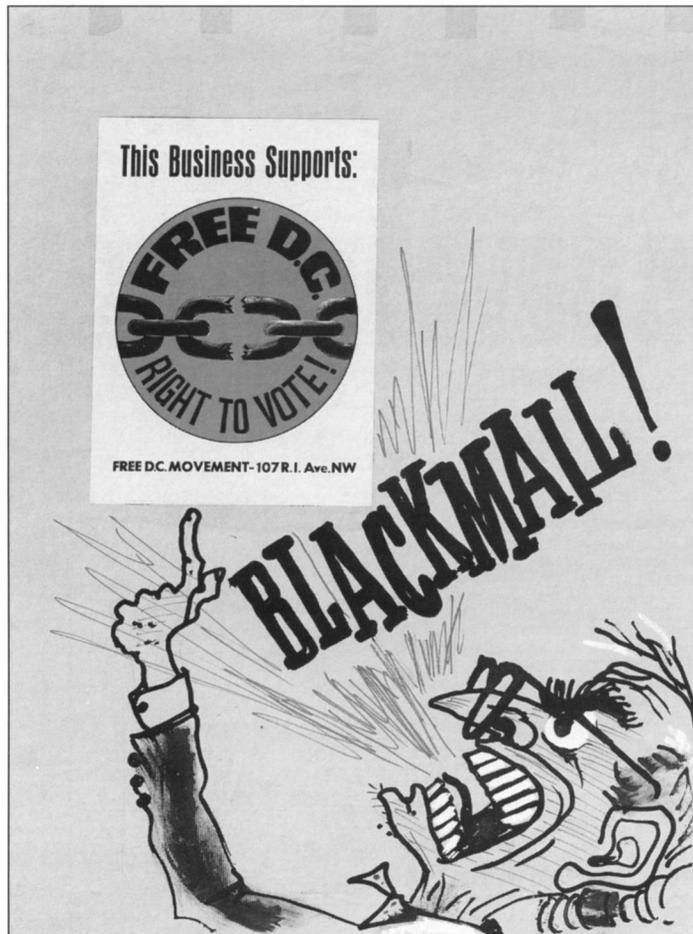
**ECTC** Emergency Committee on the Transportation Crisis  
The action-coordinating committee of organizations fighting against freeways and for rapid mass transit

R. H. BOOKER, Chairman ECTC; JOHN CARTER, Chairman Youth Mobilization  
REV. JOE GIPSON, Nash Methodist Church, Chairman Bus Boycott Committee

Sammie Abbott bluntly renders D.C. Transit owner O. Roy Chalk as a highway robber, 1966. Records of the Emergency Committee on the Transportation Crisis.

Riding the momentum of the bus boycott, on February 21, 1966, Marion Barry announced the creation of Free D.C., a coalition of civil rights groups working for home rule. Free D.C. called for a boycott of businesses owned by members of the Board of Trade and other “moneylord merchants” who opposed home rule. Supporting Free D.C. was the D.C. Coalition of Conscience, a group of leading District clergyman including Reverend Walter Fauntroy of New Bethel Baptist Church, Episcopal Suffragan Bishop Paul Moore of the Washington Diocese, Reverend Channing Phillips, and Reverend Edward A. Hailes, director of the Washington Chapter of the NAACP.<sup>10</sup>

Free D.C. members went door to door asking store owners to post bright orange stickers labeled “FREE D.C.” and make a donation to the movement. Many of the stores that posted the stickers were located in an area along H Street, N.E., that catered to a black clientele. Merchants who refused, including S. Kann’s, the Hecht Company, and Lansburgh’s, were picketed, despite the fact that each storeowner publicly stated his support for home rule. When pickets struck McBride’s variety store and Mortimer’s clothing store, owners Milton Blechman and Mortimer Lebowitz agreed to post the signs, but when Barry asked for what they considered exorbitant “donations” for Free D.C., they refused.



*Abbott mocks the congressmen who considered Free D.C.'s store boycott and fundraising tactics to be blackmail and extortion, 1966. The accusing finger of the rabid congressman points to a bright orange Free D.C. sticker, like those supportive shop owners displayed in their windows. ECTC Records.*

Soon the Coalition of Conscience and the NAACP tried to distance themselves from what they considered to be strong-arm tactics employed by Barry. McMillan, the hostile chairman of the House District Committee, eventually set up a committee to investigate Free D.C.'s activities. Barry denied all charges of extortion, but to quell the controversy, he publicly announced that all future contributions to Free D.C. would be strictly voluntary. Ultimately the boycotts brought Free D.C. and Marion Barry to the attention of the white power structure in the city. The Free D.C. Movement faded by the end of 1966, and Barry went on to other campaigns. But in 1967, when President Johnson reorganized the D.C. city government, he was responding, in part, to the efforts of Free D.C.<sup>11</sup>



*Picking up on a favorite Boston Tea Party allusion, this marcher in an April 1970 League of Women Voters Home Rule Parade hangs teabags from her umbrella, emblazoned with a "D.C. Last Colony" sticker. ESC, © WP.*

Less flamboyant than Free D.C. was the Self-Determination for D.C. Coalition, which mounted a national campaign for home rule legislation and a constitutional amendment to provide elected representation in Congress for citizens of the District of Columbia. The coalition, co-chaired by Senator Edward Brooke of Massachusetts and non-voting D.C. Delegate Walter Fauntroy, worked from the early 1970s through the early 1980s. Among the nearly 100 national and local organizations working for change were the AFL-CIO, ACLU, Common Cause, National Council of Churches, D.C. Bar Association, Leadership Conference for Civil Rights, D.C. Local of the American Federation of Government Employees, and the Greater Washington Board of Trade. Among its volunteers were civil rights leader Joseph Rauh, political activist Jan Eichorn, businessmen Delano Lewis and John Hechinger, and City Council member Sterling Tucker. The coalition testified before Congress in support of an elected mayor/council government, in 1973; Congress finally passed the Home Rule Act that year.<sup>12</sup>

In 1969 yet another tactic for securing the rights of U.S. citizenship for D.C. residents emerged: transforming the District of Columbia into the 51st state. Doug Moore, Chuck Stone, Jesse Anderson, and other activists held a press conference in March announcing the founding of the D.C. Statehood Committee. By January 1970, these activists and others, including Sam Smith and Hilda Mason, formed the D.C. Statehood Party, a liberal, homegrown political

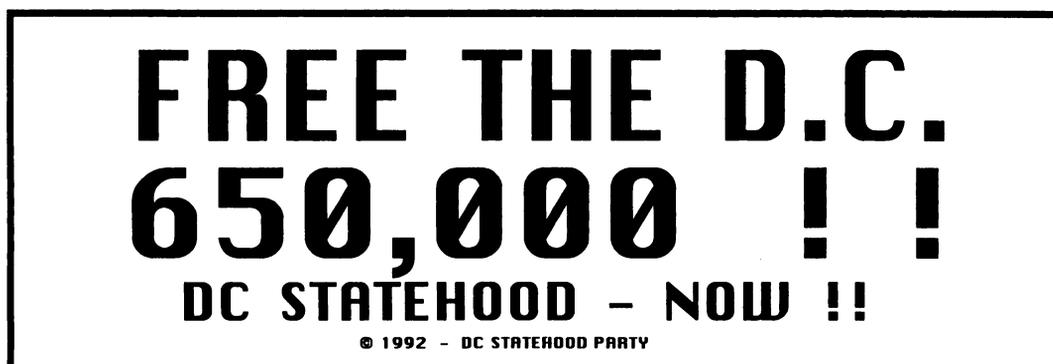
organization. Statehood supporters convinced Julius Hobson, an economist and popular D.C. civil rights activist, to run as the party's candidate for non-voting delegate to Congress in the 1971 election. Walter Fauntroy defeated Hobson, but a third party was born.<sup>13</sup>

Eight years later, Ed Guinan, a Statehood Party member, drafted a D.C. statehood initiative. A former radical Catholic priest and founder of the Center for Creative Non-Violence, Guinan came to believe that statehood offered the best hope for the uplift of the city's homeless and poor. In 1979 he drafted Initiative 3, which called for electing delegates to a D.C. Statehood Constitutional Convention for the purpose of writing a state constitution. The state constitution would be put to a ratification vote by D.C. residents and eventually presented to Congress as part of a statehood application. On November 4, 1980, D.C. voters approved Initiative 3. One year later, voters elected 45 delegates who drafted a constitution; D.C. voters approved the constitution on November 2, 1982.<sup>14</sup>

Initiative 3 established two commissions. The D.C. Statehood Commission was charged with educating and promoting statehood among city residents and those of the 50 states, the majority of whom would have to ratify the new state.<sup>15</sup> The D.C. Compact Commission's role was to study and "facilitate the transfer of authority and functions" from the city to the State of New Columbia. In 1993 the D.C. Statehood Coalition was formed to coordinate the lobbying and public events by the various organizations supporting statehood and H.R. 51, a D.C. statehood bill introduced by Delegate Fauntroy in 1987. The House did not vote on H.R. 51 until November 1993, when the bill was defeated by a vote of 277 to 153. After the defeat, the City Council severely cut the Statehood Commission's budget and its activities drastically slowed, but it has persisted to this day.<sup>16</sup>

The Citizens for New Columbia (CNC), a group of statehood activists, trade unionists, and youth leaders, were among those who came together in 1993 in a non-partisan effort to educate the public about D.C. statehood and work for passage of H.R. 51. CNC's leaders included longtime statehood supporters Josephine Butler, Ned Sloan, Tim Cooper, and Bernard Demczuk, and its steering committee included Mayor Sharon Pratt Kelly, Senator Jesse Jackson, Congressman Walter Fauntroy, and City Council Chair John Ray, among others.

For more than two months that summer, CNC demonstrated weekly in front of the Longworth House Office Building, and before it was over, more than 85 had been arrested in various protests. CNC members, including Mayor Kelly, poured tea into the streets to evoke the Boston Tea Party, in which American colonists nearly two centuries earlier had protested taxation without representation.<sup>17</sup>

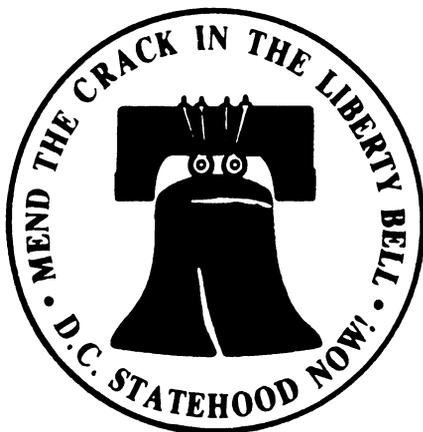
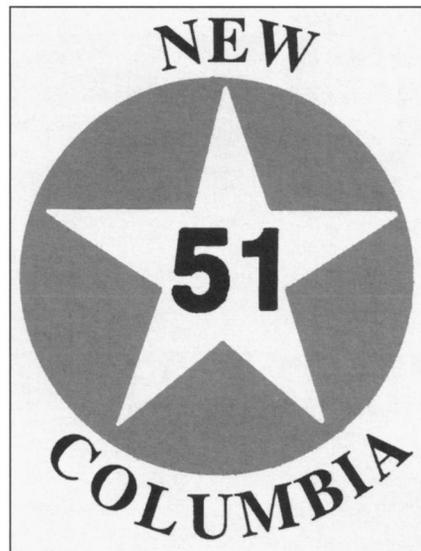


*The D.C. Statehood Party's 1992 bumper sticker demands that Congress "free the D.C. 650,000," although the population numbered 584,183 that year. Statehood Commission Records.*



*This 51-star flag was designed by Statehood Party members Helen and Armando Rendon to mark the Statehood Commission's "Statehood Day," which took place on October 4, 1974. The Rendons' flag flew over the District Building and refuted the argument that the District should not become a state because there was no room on the flag for another star. The flag continues to symbolize the statehood movement. Records of the D.C. Statehood Commission.*

*In the early 1990s, the Citizens for New Columbia printed this bumper sticker to support legislation to create New Columbia, the 51st state, from the territory known as Washington, D.C. Statehood Commission Records.*



*The D.C. Statehood Coalition adopted this logo with the slogan "Mend the Crack in the Liberty Bell" in the late 1980s. The logo was created by Apter and Associates, a public relations firm. Statehood Commission Records.*

**VOTE HOBSON**

**THE MAN  
FOR CONGRESS  
AND THE  
CITY**

**MARCH 23, 1971**

**D.C. STATEHOOD PARTY**

PAID FOR BY AUTHORITY OF:  
Walter Mylecraine, Treasurer

*Julius Hobson in his trademark fedora looks thoughtfully from this poster, made during his campaign for non-voting delegate on the Statehood Party ticket, 1971. Although he lost that election to Walter Fauntroy, in 1974 Hobson was elected councilman-at-large. Poster Collection.*

One of the most effective and visible of the political action groups that sprang up in the city was the Emergency Committee on the Transportation Crisis. The ECTC was a multi-racial, grassroots organization of area residents and citizens' associations united in the battle against freeway construction in the 1960s and early 1970s. ECTC, so-named in 1965, grew out of efforts by Brookland and Takoma Park neighborhood residents working to prevent government confiscation of their homes in the path of the North Central Freeway. Its leaders included Angela Rooney, Tom Rooney, and Fred Huette of the Brookland neighborhood; publicity director and chief spokesman Sammie Abbott; and influential Washington civil rights activists Julius Hobson and Reginald Booker.

ECTC relied heavily on public demonstrations, rallies, and meetings to attract attention and support. Its members, including the Northwest Committee for Transportation Planning, the Northeast Council of Citizens Associations, among others, argued that freeway routes designed by a string of governmental planning groups would be particularly devastating to predominately black and less affluent neighborhoods in Southwest Washington and east of Rock Creek Park, although at times Cleveland Park, parts of Georgetown, and upper Northwest Washington and Bethesda were targeted as well. To publicize the racial inequity inherent in highway construction, Abbott coined the rallying cry "No White Men's Road Through Black Men's Homes" featured in ECTC's posters and flyers.

The seeds of the controversy over highway construction were planted in the 1950s and eventually led to opposition not only in Washington, but in most of the nation's major urban areas. In the D.C. area, from the 1950s through the 1970s, local and federal highway planners worked to create a comprehensive urban expressway system to link Washington to the national interstate highway system.

With so many people flocking to the suburbs, city planners and business leaders turned in the 1950s to highway construction as a means to make it easy for the new suburbanites to continue coming downtown. In addition, civil defense agencies such as the National Security Resources Board encouraged highway construction and dispersal of employment outside urban areas to safeguard against the consequences of nuclear attack. The National Capital Park and Planning Commission addressed these trends with plans for dispersal of federal employment outside the city, with urban renewal projects, and through the construction of city freeways.

The 1950 comprehensive plan of the National Capital Park and Planning Commission recommended constructing three circumferential highways or loops. The inner loop would circle the White House at a distance of one-half mile. The second loop would be located three to six miles out, and the third would be outside the city at a distance of six to ten miles (eventually this one was built as the Capital Beltway). Other north-south highways would link the loops. Making the plans feasible was passage of the National Highway Act of 1956, which increased the federal portion of highway funding from 50 to 90 percent. In 1959, the renamed National Capital Planning Commission and the National Capital Regional Planning Council issued its "Mass Transportation Survey," which recommended 329 miles of highways and a 33-mile rail system in the metropolitan area.<sup>18</sup>

Although the Commission and District highway planners made many revisions to the plan throughout the 1960s, key elements that remained included a highway through redeveloped Southwest Washington, a six-lane freeway in upper Northwest D.C. (encompassing Wisconsin Avenue) to connect the Inner Loop with Maryland I-70, a North Central freeway and East Leg of the Inner Loop, and a six-to-eight-lane bridge linking the Inner Loop via Georgetown and to I-66 through Arlington and across the Three Sisters Island. Affluent white residents of upper Northwest successfully killed the Wisconsin Avenue interstate.

Then they joined with citizens of black and less affluent neighborhoods in Southwest and east of Rock Creek Park, who also faced the destruction of thousands of homes in their neighborhoods.

ECTC members picketed Congress and Mayor Walter Washington's home in LeDroit Park, were arrested after a sit-in at the proposed construction site of the Three Sisters Bridge, and protested at City Council meetings. ECTC also lobbied public officials and testified at countless hearings. Legal challenges led by citizen groups and a declining will to pursue highways eventually left the city with a series of odd interchanges and the Southeast-Southwest Freeway.<sup>19</sup>

**A**s ECTC's chief spokesman and graphic artist, Abbott created dozens of flyers, posters, and picket signs that ridiculed and lambasted supporters of freeway construction. In so doing, Abbott attracted attention for his fierce fighting spirit, sense of humor, and artistic talents. Before moving to Washington in the 1940s, Abbott devoted much of his life to championing workers' rights, progressive politics, and peace as well as developing his artistic talent. The grandson of Arab Christian immigrants who fled Turkish persecution in Syria, Abbott grew up in Ithaca, New York, and studied art and architecture at Cornell University. In the early 1930s, at the height of the Great Depression, Abbott, just six credits shy of a degree, left Cornell to organize farm workers and the unemployed near Buffalo, New York. As an unpaid volunteer, he sold watercolors for \$.10 apiece to support himself.

After moving to Washington, Abbott worked in construction, where he helped to organize laborers and a hod carriers' union. When he returned from World War II as a decorated Air Force veteran, Abbott led local petition drives for Lord Bertrand Russell's Stockholm Peace Petition, which vowed never again to use the atomic bomb. Abbott worked for Progressive Party presidential candidate Henry Wallace in 1948 and fought for desegregation in the early 1950s. As a result of these political activities, Abbott was called to testify before the House Un-American Activities Committee and subsequently lost his job as a commercial artist with the public relations firm of Henry J. Kaufman & Associates. After he was black-listed for more than two years, he started a life-long career as a free-lance artist.<sup>20</sup>

Abbott's strong opposition to freeway construction through local neighborhoods attracted him to the anti-freeway cause in 1963. In 1980 he was elected mayor of Takoma Park, Maryland, with a progressive agenda that led to the city's moniker as "Berkeley of the East." Abbott died in 1990. His posters, flyers, and picket signs for ECTC and other causes are found in the Records of the Emergency Committee on the Transportation Crisis at the Washingtoniana Division.<sup>21</sup>

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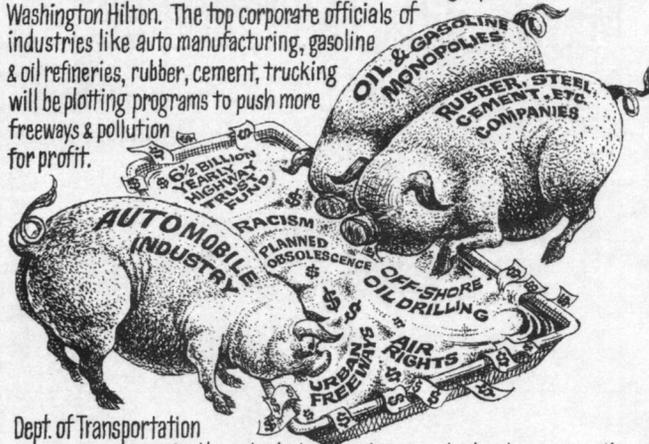


With the sparest of imagery, this Abbott pick-et sign evokes the emotions of opponents of Interstate-95 construction. ECTC Records.

At the same time millions of citizens & students are using Earth Day Teach-Ins to mobilize defense of the environment against pollution...

## *The World's Biggest Polluters are having their own Teach-In!*

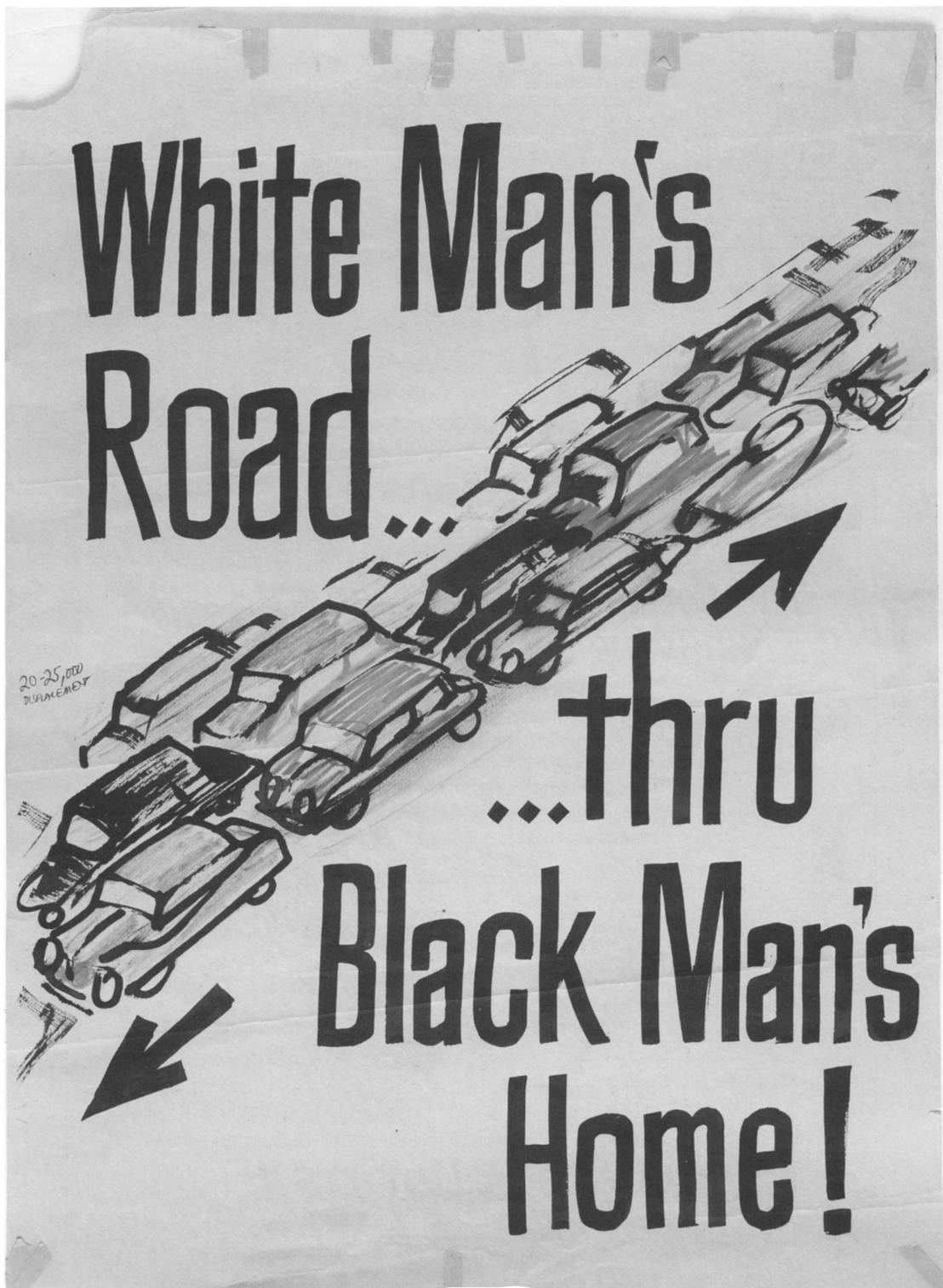
The notorious Highway Lobby—under its high-sounding alias, THE HIGHWAY USERS FEDERATION FOR SAFETY & MOBILITY—is meeting April 20, 21, 22 at the Washington Hilton. The top corporate officials of industries like auto manufacturing, gasoline & oil refineries, rubber, cement, trucking will be plotting programs to push more freeways & pollution for profit.



Dept. of Transportation Secretary Volpe will address his buddies at their Tuesday luncheon. We call on all fighters against freeways, pollution, racism, and corporate plunder to...

## ***Picket the Polluters!!!***

In this announcement for a rally against highway-building interests, Abbott used a favorite image: ravenous pigs gorging at the public trough. ECTC Records.



*Sammie Abbott coined the slogan "White Man's Road through Black Man's Home," which pointedly protested the tendency of city highway construction to destroy poor and minority communities. ECTC Records.*



*Abbott, left, next to Reginald Booker, makes a point during testimony before a D.C. City Council hearing on freeways in January 1970. ESC, © WP.*



*Protesters on the Three Sisters Island in the Potomac unfurl a banner as part of an attempt to block construction of the Three Sisters Bridge, 1969. ESC, © WP. *

## The Art of D.C. Politics

Faye P. Haskins, pp. 46-63

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