

Washington, DC's 1973 Acquisition of Home Rule after One Hundred Years: Confronting the
Issues of Race and Representation in the Nation's Capital

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Walter E. Fauntroy became Washington, DC's first non-voting representative in Congress on March 23, 1971. Washingtonians had been without self-government for nearly a century, so as the district's first Congressman, Fauntroy pushed for home rule legislation, overpowering opponents by threatening their political power. On July 19, 1973, Representative Fauntroy warned Frank Annunzio, a white representative from Chicago, about the threat of Republicans mobilizing black voters in order to remove Democrats from power. As examples, he cited the two cases of District Committee members John L. McMillan and Earle Cabell who were defeated as a result of "dramatic shifts in the black vote away from the Democratic party." McMillan's defeat was particularly notable, for as Chairman of the House District Committee, he led a group of white, southern segregationists in blocking home rule legislation from the House floor for over 20 years. In this letter, Fauntroy strongly implied that if representatives did not support DC home rule, as in the cases of McMillan and Cabell, they faced the possibility of losing their seats. Fauntroy concluded, "I am anxious to discuss my concerns...and offer some suggestions as to how I and other Black colleagues of mine, can be of assistance in nullifying such a strategy by our Republican opponents."¹ While Fauntroy claimed to be reaching out as a fellow Democrat, concerned with the position of his colleague against Republican opposition, he was, perhaps not so subtly, threatening Annunzio with the rising power of black voters nationally, in order to achieve self-governance for his own district.

Just a little over a decade earlier, but prior to the significant mobilization and legislation of the civil rights era, The Washington Home Rule Committee, a local organization comprised of

¹ Walter E. Fauntroy to Frank Annunzio, 19 July 1973. Box 45, Folder 19, The Walter E. Fauntroy papers, GWU Special Collections, The George Washington University.

white, liberal leaders, actively sought to allay white fears of the political empowerment of DC's African American community. Carefully acknowledging the issue of race, the committee explained, in a 1959 report written in support of a home rule bill, that "the matter has to be handled by us, ourselves, on a calm, deliberate and cooperative basis. Other cities with substantial Negro populations have found that participation... has aided substantially in reducing racial problems."² At that point in the struggle for home rule, local, grassroots organizations favored a "calm, deliberate and cooperative basis" for attaining self-government. However, by the late 1960s and early 1970s, black leaders were no longer willing to petition calmly on behalf of the 71 percent of DC residents who were African American.

Washington, DC attained home rule in 1973 when black leaders demonstrated to the entire nation that DC's right to self-government was an issue of civil rights. Only when DC home rule was understood as a larger, national issue and recognized as a matter of racial injustice did Washington residents regain the right to elect their own representatives.

Various scholars have provided background and arguments to consider questions about why Washington, DC lost home rule, why Congress continually limited the city's rights, and why, in 1973, Washingtonians regained some semblance of self-government. Most have recognized Washington, DC's century-long lack of home rule as a democratic and racial injustice. For instance, while he only briefly discusses home rule, Howard Gillette, Jr. explores the history of a capital city constantly struggling to find balance between the issues of beautification and racial justice.³ Also providing earlier background into Washington, DC's complex history, Kate Masur focuses on Washington, DC as a capital for experimentation in

² The Washington Home Rule Committee to D.C. Citizens, 1959. Box 26, Folder 17, Walter E. Washington papers, The Moorland-Spangarn Research Center, Howard University.

³ Howard Gillette, *Between Justice and Beauty: Race, Planning, and the Failure of Urban Policy in Washington, D.C.* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006).

social policy during the Civil War and Reconstruction. Particularly, she connects the city's 1862 emancipation bill as the legislation that not only freed fugitive slaves, but also subsequently contributed to the elimination of their voting rights in the capital city in the next decade.⁴

Catherine Maddison similarly explores home rule as an issue of race, but through focusing on the organization and failure of the Free DC Movement in the 1960s.⁵

Other scholars offer answers to question about why the struggle for home rule lasted so long and why legislation eventually passed. Christopher Klemek compares Washington and Paris, two cities that struggled to attain home rule for nearly a century. He concludes that both capital cities were regions of political experimentation and social inequity.⁶ Also, Mark S. Greek traces the roots of local protests for home rule, through photographs, documents and political cartoons, linking the success of home rule to civil rights protests in the 1960s.⁷ Finally, Bell Julian Clement suggests that one may understand why home rule legislation passed in 1973 by exploring high crime rates in the capital city, noting that the Nixon administration favored a limited home rule bill in order to relieve the federal government of local bureaucratic and judicial duties.⁸

Most significantly, in his 2013 dissertation, Gregory Borchardt argues that the combined effort of home rule support and local civil rights activism contributed to DC's movement toward

⁴ 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).

⁵ Catherine Maddison, "In Chains 400 Years... And Still in Chains in DC! The Free DC movement and the Challenges of Organizing in the City," *Journal of American Studies* 41, no. 1 (2007): 186.

⁶ Christopher Klemek, "Exceptionalism and the National Capital in the Late 20th Century Washington, DC and Paris" in *Capital Dilemma: Growth and Inequality in Washington, DC*, ed. Derek Hyra and Sabiyha Prince (New York: Routledge, 2016), 13.

⁷ Mark S. Greek, *Washington, D.C. Protests: Scenes from Home Rule to the Civil Rights Movement* (Charleston: The History Press, 2009).

⁸ Bell Julian Clement, "Primed for Development: Washington, DC's Great Society Transitions, 1964-1974," in *Capital Dilemma: Growth and Inequality in Washington, DC*, ed. Derek Hyra and Sabiyha Prince (New York: Routledge, 2016).

self-government in 1973.⁹ Borchardt correctly identifies the issue of home rule as an extension of the local civil rights movement, however it is also important to acknowledge that this legislation could not have passed without political support across the nation.

A Captive Capital: Changes for Home Rule in the Nineteenth Century

From its inception as a capital city, Washington's residents possessed limited rights to self-government. Article I, Section VIII of the United States Constitution granted Congress "exclusive Legislation in all Cases whatsoever, over such District."¹⁰ By 1802, Congress granted the capital city its own charter, establishing a mayor, appointed by the president, and an elected bicameral legislature. However, all powers not explicitly allowed to the local government remained under the exclusive jurisdiction of Congress.¹¹ In a subsequent charter, granted to the District of Columbia in 1820, Congress allowed citizens to elect their mayor, established a federal payment to the city, and transferred certain powers to the nation's capital, including the right to establish a board of health, supply the city with water, and create an annual lottery.¹² Then, under the Organic Act of 1871, Congress combined Washington and Georgetown under one territory, which they named the District of Columbia, and ended the right to elected government.¹³ Following the corrupt mayoralty of Sales Bowen, President Grant appointed Alexander Shepherd, who facilitated the city's financial demise, as governor of Washington in 1873, but by 1874, Washington, DC once again functioned under the exclusive authority of Congress.¹⁴

⁹ Gregory M. Borchardt, "Making D.C. Democracy's Capital: Local Activism, the 'Federal States', and the Struggle for Civil Rights in Washington, D.C." (PhD diss., The George Washington University, 2013), 232-281.

¹⁰ U.S. Const. art. I, § VIII.

¹¹ Gillette, *Between Justice and Beauty*, 13.

¹² *Ibid*, 14.

¹³ *Ibid*, 64-66.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 53-58.

While Howard Gillette, Jr. implicitly links the relationship between DC's loss of home rule and race, he focuses on financial mismanagement by the elected government as the primary cause for this deprivation of democratic rights. For instance, Gillette notes that in 1874, a Congressional committee that analyzed Washington, DC's financial progress found that the city government was 18 million dollars in debt as a result of overspending for infrastructure, unpaid taxes, and a weak tax base.¹⁵ As a result of this severe deficit, the Judiciary Committees suggested that Congress take financial responsibility for the city, handing over all control. Gillette concluded, "Indeed, by 1874, giving up suffrage in the District- and all the social baggage it carried- was considered worth achieving the long-standing goal of federal support for physical improvements."¹⁶

However, other scholars argue that the capital city lost home rule due to white fear of its growing black population. Before Abraham Lincoln's January 1863 Emancipation Proclamation, an emancipation bill was tested, beginning in April 1862, in the capital city. As a result, thousands of fugitive slaves flocked to the city seeking freedom and opportunity.¹⁷ Christopher Klemek argues that white fear of the voting power of the newly enfranchised black population resulted in Washington's loss of self-government. "But the 1870s suppression of this Black power specter... suggested not a victorious Union capital," Klemek argues, "so much as the rollback of civil rights in 'redeemed' areas of the former Confederacy."¹⁸ While scholars differ on the primary cause that led to the disenfranchisement of Washingtonians, it is indisputable that the capital city's residents lost control of their municipal affairs because legislators believed that Congress, first and foremost, possessed exclusive jurisdiction over the city.

¹⁵ Ibid, 64.

¹⁶ Ibid, 66.

¹⁷ Kate Masur, *An Example for All the Land*, 15.

¹⁸ Christopher Klemek, "Exceptionalism and the National Capital in the Late 20th Century Washington, DC and Paris," 13.

The Early, Ineffective Struggle for Home Rule in Washington, D.C.

Although DC residents fought to regain a semblance of self-government throughout the twentieth century, Congressional segregationists continuously thwarted their efforts. “By 1920,” Greek notes, “only felons, traitors, the insane and Washingtonians lacked the right to vote.”¹⁹ One Congressional committee was responsible for keeping Washingtonians on this reviled spectrum: the House Committee on the District of Columbia, led by Chairman John L. McMillan, the staunchest opponent of home rule. Beginning in 1948, McMillan, representing a district of South Carolina in Congress, “ruled with courtly indifference to the demands and concerns of the city’s residents,” as the de facto “mayor” of Washington, DC.²⁰

When a glimmer of hope shone in Congress in 1965 in the form of a home rule bill supported by Lyndon Baines Johnson, McMillan and his committee prevented its passage. Instead, President Johnson settled for the 1967 Reorganization Act in which the president could appoint a mayor-commissioner, assistant mayor-commissioner, and a nine-member city council.²¹ This was the most significant legislation in 93 years that placed some fraction of power into the hands of Washingtonians, but the House District Committee still retained legislative power over the District. McMillan repeatedly resisted home rule legislation and used his power as chairman to prevent home rule bills from ever leaving the House District Committee, despite successful legislation passed by the Senate. As long as McMillan remained in power, the House of Representatives would never address the call for a home rule bill by the Senate and public.

¹⁹ Greek, *Washington D.C. Protests*, 17.

²⁰ Sam Smith, *Captive Capital: Colonial Life in Modern Washington* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1974), 142.

²¹ Lyndon B. Johnson, “Special Message to the Congress Transmitting Reorganization Plan 3,” 1 June 1967. *ProQuest Congressional* database. Accessed 15 September 2015.

Decades before black Congressional leaders adopted the fight against Representative McMillan, among others, for self-government in DC during the 1970s, female leaders had made the issue part of their own campaign for voting rights. Prior to women's suffrage in 1920, women's organization fought to grant voting rights to Washington residents. Adopting both causes, at the National American Women Suffrage Association's Women's Suffrage March in 1913, protesters held a banner that proclaimed "WE WANT THE VOTE IN THE DISTRICT FOR BOTH MEN AND WOMEN."²² Women continued supporting home rule for the District of Columbia once they gained the right to vote. For instance, the District Federation of Women's Clubs drafted a 1949 letter to be circulated to each state federation that relayed the need for suffrage in the District of Columbia.²³

While women in Washington, DC worked tirelessly to gain home rule for Washingtonians, women in other states also participated in the fight, citing the struggle as a democratic, rather than racial, injustice. For example, in May 1938, the General Federation of Women's Clubs met in Detroit and adopted a resolution calling for suffrage for Washingtonians. The club endorsed "an amendment to the Constitution ... empowering the Congress to grant to the residents of the District of Columbia voting representation in the Senate and the House of Representatives and among the electors of President."²⁴ Over a decade later, female leaders outside of the District continued to rally for DC home rule. One such example of a female leader supporting self-government for Washington, DC on a national scale was Mrs. Wade Van Valkenburg, a leader in the Michigan Federation of Women's Clubs, who met with Jesse C. Suter, acting chairman of the Citizens' Joint Committee on National Representation for the

²² Greek, *Washington D.C. Protests*, 18.

²³ "Women's Clubs: Federation Letter to Tell of District's Suffrage Plight" *The Evening Star*, 20 December 1949. Vertical Files, Box 30, The Historical Society of Washington, DC.

²⁴ "Women Seek Vote for D.C.," Vertical Files, Box 30, The Historical Society of Washington, DC.

District, about the issue of home rule. While women in DC, and across the nation, rallied for self-government for Washingtonians, by the 1950s, they made no significant progress.

Like the women's organizations, the Washington Home Rule Committee endorsed home rule without directly addressing racial inequality. Although this organization recognized DC home rule to be a civil rights issue, its white liberal leaders largely avoided recognizing the problem as racial.²⁵ In a 1959 memorandum to the Board of Directors from the Legislative Counsel of the Washington Home Rule Committee, leaders did not condemn the actions of Chairman McMillan. Although the committee recognized that 1959 was the first year McMillan agreed to hold hearings, the counsel applauded, "McMillan's statement serves as a significant starting point for proponents of home rule to demonstrate to the members of the House that a bona fide effort is being made to utilize the traditional committee approach to legislation."²⁶ Rather than to criticize McMillan for the overdue wait, the Washington Home Rule Committee praised the man who had hindered home rule efforts for over a decade. In another document produced in that same year, the Washington Home Rule Committee addressed the issue of race, but took a more conservative position. The committee concluded, "And it is only because of the excesses of the Reconstruction era that we do not still have it as we did have for 70 years."²⁷ Once again, the Washington Home Rule Committee failed to acknowledge racial discrimination, and rather suggested that the corruption of DC's black politicians in the nineteenth century led to the end of home rule in the District.

Other groups in favor of home rule during this period chose to emphasize racial injustice regarding Washington, DC's lack of self-government, but lacked unity. By the 1960s, the issue

²⁵ Gregory M. Borchardt, "Making D.C. Democracy's Capital," 244.

²⁶ Legislative Counsel to Board of Directors, 18 March 1959. Folder 3, The Home Rule Committee papers, The Martin Luther King Public Library Special Collections.

²⁷ The Washington Home Rule Committee to D.C. Citizens, 1959. Box 26, Folder 17, Walter E. Washington papers, The Moorland-Spangarn Research Center, Howard University.

of race became increasingly hard to ignore, for the 1960 census determined 54 percent of Washingtonians were black.²⁸ Organizations such as the D.C. Coalition of Conscience, an organization of interracial ministers, the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee, a group of young home rule advocates including Marion Barry, and the DC branch of the NAACP fought in the early 1960s for racial justice in the form of DC self-government. In February 1965, these three groups joined together to form the Free D.C. Movement.²⁹ This organization, however, was unsuccessful, for in an attempt to win home rule legislation in Congress, members often downplayed the racial components of the movement. “The way in which Free DC sometimes framed home rule, as a non-racial issue,” Catherine Maddison argues, “also helped obscure the racism behind disfranchisement and made it more difficult for African Americans to feel motivated to fight it.”³⁰ In most cases, scholars overemphasize the role of such local organizations in the success of home rule legislation, but in reality, this bill could not have passed without national, Congressional support.

Although many women’s groups and local organizations were hesitant to equate DC home rule with racial equality, national newspapers recognized the racial components of this struggle, calling for self-government in the nation’s capital. For instance, in 1959, the *Washington Post* published an article titled, “Press in 16 States Calls for Home Rule in D.C.” The newspaper compiled a list of excerpts from papers across the United States that brought awareness to the racial components of DC home rule. One clipping, from the *New York Herald Tribune*, proclaimed: “A small group of Southerners in the District Committee of the House of Representatives, wishing to keep matters of racial policy in their own hands... has persistently bottled up the necessary legislation.” Recognizing that racism prevented self-government in DC,

²⁸ Smith, *Captive Capital*, 111.

²⁹ Borchardt, “Making D.C. Democracy’s Capital,” 258-261.

³⁰ Maddison, “In Chains 400 Years... And Still in Chains in DC!,” 186.

the *New York Herald Tribune* gave its support for DC home rule. Similarly, the *San Francisco Chronicle* stated: “The rest of the country well knows that home rule has been denied to Washington, D.C. all these years because past Congresses insisted on fighting the Civil War again there.”³¹ The *San Francisco Chronicle* also alluded to the racial tensions surrounding home rule by comparing the situation in Washington to a war generally thought to have been fought about protecting the rights of the southern slaveholder. By citing the Civil War, the California newspaper explained DC’s struggle for self-government as a racial fight. Although newspapers recognized racism in Congress, calling for self-government, home rule advocates did not meet success in these early years without organized support in Congress.

Hobson, Fauntroy and the 1971 Race that Gave Washingtonians a Voice in Congress

Throughout the twentieth century, DC residents advocated for home rule, but it was not until the issue was propelled onto a national stage that legislation was finally signed into law in 1973. The 1971 election for Washington, D.C.’s first non-voting delegate to Congress reveals that Washingtonians recognized that in order to attain home rule, the elected representative would not only need local influence, but also must possess the ability to compromise with Congressmen from across the nation. One of the key figures in this campaign was civil rights activist and African- American candidate, Julius Hobson. While Julius Hobson is not remembered as widely today as Walter E. Fauntroy, Walter E. Washington, or Marion Barry, he was a notable leader in DC politics in the second half of the twentieth century. Journalists describe how “the straight talking, pipe- smoking, gnarled militant in pork-pie hat desegregated

³¹ “Press in 16 States Calls for Home Rule in D.C.” *The Washington Post*, 25 March 1959. Box 26, Folder 17, Walter E. Washington papers, The Moorland- Spingarn Research Center, Howard University.

rental housing, forced downtown stores to hire black clerks, and heaped abuse on the black clergy for creating passive congregations.”³²

Not only was Hobson a civil rights advocate, but he was also the leading proponent for the struggle for complete statehood for Washington, DC. Hobson was not in favor of mere home rule, but rather would only accept full statehood for the District of Columbia. On May 22, 1972, the *DC Gazette*, a progressive newspaper, headed by Sam Smith, wrote to Hobson that he had won the First Gazette Poll to determine who had produced significant “positive change” for the nation’s capital. “Just over half of the respondents listed your name,” Smith noted, “The nearest competition was Marion Barry and he got one-third as many votes.”³³ While Barry’s subsequent career as mayor has secured him the more prominent place in DC history, in the early 1970s, it was Hobson who was viewed as the more significant leader. But if Hobson was so highly regarded in Washington, why is he largely absent in the historical narrative of home rule for Washington, DC?

When Washingtonians turned out to elect the District of Columbia’s first non-voting member to Congress, the first time residents possessed the ability to choose their own leader in 97 years, they understood their chosen representative needed the skills to maneuver politically on a national stage. In the Democratic primary elections for this position, held on January 12, 1971, residents chose among four African American candidates: Walter E. Fauntroy, Channing Phillips, Joseph Yeldell, and Julius Hobson, Sr.³⁴ Black leaders throughout the capital sought to ensure that this election produced a symbolic leader who would fight for rights for the District within Congress. This nominee would need to be influential enough to compete with John A.

³² Harry Jaffe and Tom Sherwood, *Dream City: Race, Power and the Decline of Washington D.C.* (New York: David Black Agency, 1994), 39-40.

³³ Sam Smith, *The DC Gazette* to Julius Hobson, 22 May 1972. Box 33, Folder 2, Julius Hobson papers, The Martin Luther King Public Library Special Collections.

³⁴ Jaffe and Sherwood, *Dream City*, 96.

Nevius, the unopposed, white Republican, to represent the black majority in the city. Would not Julius Hobson, a well-known, local, African American be the obvious candidate?

On January 12, 1971, Walter E. Fauntroy won the Democratic primary, outscoring Yeldell and Phillips in 88 precincts and winning 40 percent in 86 wards. Fauntroy received the majority of the less affluent votes, while the other two candidates collected the votes of middle class whites and higher income black constituents.³⁵ Notably, *The Washington Star* did not mention Hobson as a significant contender, suggesting that statehood for D.C. was not the highest priority for the electorate.

Julius Hobson received fewer votes in the Democratic primary than Fauntroy, Yeldell, and Phillips, for some recognized that he was unwilling to compromise on his political views. Running under the banner of the Statehood Party, Hobson was not in favor of home rule, and unwilling to compromise in his support for DC statehood. "The DC Statehood Party," Smith described, "Found itself developing a black-white coalition that attracted the radical and the impatient, drawing best among young professionals."³⁶ It should be noted that Smith dedicated his 1974 book, *Captive Capital: Colonial Life in Modern Washington*, to Julius Hobson, and yet, even Smith recognized Hobson and his party as uncompromising, for he associated the DC Statehood Party, which he, himself, supported, with words like "radical" and "impatient." Some of Hobson's supporters found his unwavering dedication to his visions for DC as an advantage in taking on Congress. One supporter wrote: "If this man is not effective as a compromiser, I believe he'll be that much more effective as a man who can expose the facts (the real truths) and

³⁵ "Fauntroy Got Big Push from the Less Affluent," *The Washington Star*, January 1971. Folder 5, District of Columbia Home Rule Research Collection. The Historical Society of Washington, DC.

³⁶ Smith, *Captive Capital*, 22.

make the Broyhills feel as naked as a baby on the floor of the House.”³⁷ This supporter believed in Hobson’s effectiveness so genuinely, that he argued that Hobson could defeat DC self-government opponents and segregationists, like Virginia Representative Joel Broyhill. It is evident that Hobson’s supporters wanted not only a decisive victory for a black candidate, but also a Congressman who could defend the District in Congress, something of which Hobson did not believe Walter Fauntroy capable.

Even after his failed primary campaign, Hobson continued to run as an independent candidate in the general election, insinuating that Fauntroy was too compromising in his views. An example in which Hobson openly doubted Fauntroy’s resolve, is a March 11, 1971 telegram in which Hobson challenged Fauntroy to a debate, taunting the obvious frontrunner. Hobson asserted, “If Martin Luther King Jr. were alive what would he support, statehood or a colony for DC? And if ‘Free at last, free at last’ has any meaning than it can only be found in statehood for DC.”³⁸ In this telegram, Hobson criticized Fauntroy’s numerous references to his time working with Martin Luther King Jr. According to Smith, Hobson “accused Fauntroy of ‘running in the shadow of a dead man.’”³⁹ While Hobson evidently had no patience for compromise, it was apparent that many sought a more moderate candidate. For instance, in a response to Hobson’s demands for more time to answer Fauntroy’s remarks during a political debate, WRC-TV claimed that Fauntroy made no “personal attack.” The news station summarized, “The basic view expressed by Congressman Fauntroy was that there is a growing number of whites who are

³⁷ Anonymous Hobson Supporter. Box 33, Folder 2. *Julius Hobson papers*, The Martin Luther King Public Library Special Collections.

³⁸ Telegram from Julius Hobson to Walter E. Fauntroy, 11 March 1971. Box 33, Folder 3, *Julius Hobson papers*, The Martin Luther King Public Library Special Collections.

³⁹ Smith, *Captive Capital*, 261.

increasingly concerned about the basic problems that confront blacks, and that... they must vote together on the same issues.”⁴⁰

Local organization, however, recognized that Fauntroy was the only man who could gain victory for the Democratic Party and make a significant national case for DC self-government in Congress. On February 17, 1971, the National Progressive Citizens Association, a political, grassroots organization, wrote to Hobson asking him to step down, to avoid splitting the black vote. Defending their support of Fauntroy, the group reasoned that “he will, no doubt, carry the greater percentage of the white vote and the non-whites plus a small percentage of the ‘Toms.’” (Here, the NCPA referenced Harriett Beecher Stowe’s 1852 novel *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, in which Uncle Tom is remembered in American culture as a black slave who was loyal to white slave owners.⁴¹) It is evident that the NPCA considered Fauntroy to be a moderate candidate, who could be supported outside of the African American community. The organization concluded: “Clearly, “Whitey” (Nevius) will win easily, unless these candidates are willing to recognize the facts and withdraw while there is still time.”⁴² The National Progressive Citizens Association sought, above all, a victory for an African-American candidate. Finally, on March 23, 1971, Fauntroy claimed a Congressional seat, for the first time, for the District of Columbia.

The rhetoric and outcome of the 1971 election for Washington, DC’s first non-voting member of Congress demonstrates that many efforts for home rule did not come to fruition on the local scale, because DC leaders were unwilling to make compromises. Popular figures like Julius Hobson demanded a change as dramatic as statehood, and therefore, under his leadership, Washingtonians possessed a small chance of acquiring home rule with a split, local constituency.

⁴⁰ Burton Bridgens, WRC-TV to Julius Hobson, 3 May 1971. Box 33, Folder 3, Julius Hobson papers, The Martin Luther King Public Library Special Collections.

⁴¹ Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (Boston: John P. Jewett and Company, 1852).

⁴² The National Progressive Citizens Association to Independent Candidates, 17 February 1971. Box 33, Folder 3, *Julius Hobson papers*, The Martin Luther King Public Library Special Collections.

In the 1970s, the entire nation, including the majority of Washingtonians, needed to support legislation for a moderate version of home rule to attain even a limited idea of self- government.

The Racial Struggle to Democratize the Chocolate City

While one significant cause for the century long delay of home rule was the divide among Washingtonians about the various forms of self-government, the most significant hindrance was racism. Some Americans who were opposed to DC self-government, exhibiting racist beliefs were citizens who worked in Washington, but commuted from Maryland and Virginia. Writing to Virginia Congressman Joel Broyhill, a staunch opponent of home rule, Roy L. Leinster, a retired veteran, explained his opposition with racist remarks on March 24, 1972. “If our government continues to pander the minorities,” Leinster explained, “the time may come when we will have no alternative but to form a White American Society for Progress, WASP, for short, to reestablish this democracy.”⁴³ It is evident that Mr. Leinster, a resident of Chevy Chase, Maryland, recognized Washington, DC as a federal city in which Americans should not allow a “minority” race to control. In this case, Leinster valued white supremacy over American democracy. Writing just five months after Leinster, another Maryland resident, Mrs. Maud Scott Edgell expressed a similar fear. Of the possibility of Washingtonians gaining the right to vote, she wrote, “If this tragedy should occur... it will be a great triumph to our enemies around the world and a complete collapse of our Nations Prestige home and abroad.” Mrs. Edgell continued, “Think what it will mean- a land predominately White- turned over to another Race.”⁴⁴ Like Mr. Leinster, it is apparent that Mrs. Edgell considered Washington to be a federal city, belonging to the whole nation, and believed the city’s black population in the city to be a “minority” and

⁴³ Roy L. Leinster to Representative Broyhill, 24 March 1972. Box 75, Folder 9, The Gilbert Gude papers, GWU Special Collections, The George Washington University.

⁴⁴ Mrs. Maud Scott Edgell to Representative Broyhill, 14 August 1972. Box 75, Folder 9, *The Gilbert Gude papers*, GWU Special Collections, The George Washington University.

disassociated from the United States of America. In another instance, David Meth, expressed his disbelief to Maryland Representative Gilbert Gude about Gude's support for home rule in DC. "Blacks have so much power in D.C., that if given home rule, a white person will not be able to walk on the streets in D.C.... I am not a racist," Meth concluded.⁴⁵ Meth's final declaration that he was "not a racist" demonstrates that DC home rule was widely recognized as a racial issue by 1972. His concluding statement, following a racist claim, also demonstrates that these ideas of race were so ingrained into American society that Meth could not recognize his own ignorance.

Racism was not only prevalent among the American people, but also deeply rooted in Congress. The most powerful opponent of home rule was Chairman of the House District Committee John L. McMillan. As previously mentioned, Representative McMillan exhibited prejudice through actions, continuously blocking home rule legislation for the capital city. Although Representative McMillan represented only a population of approximately 25,000 in Florence, South Carolina, he was given authority over the nearly 800,000 residents of Washington, DC from 1948 to 1972.⁴⁶ "As Chairman of the House District Committee," Journalists Harry S. Jaffe and Tom Sherwood explain, "Johnny Mack" treated the city as if it were his plantation and turned the District Building into a fiefdom for his own patronage jobs."⁴⁷ Although the slavery simile used to describe McMillan's behavior may seem like a gross exaggeration, McMillan's segregationist beliefs led him to abuse his power as chairman. One of the most notable images of the home rule struggle is from a Free D.C. Movement flyer, entitled "In Chains 400 Years... And *Still* In Chains in D.C." In the center of the cartoon an African American figure is held with a lock around his neck with three figures pulling on the attached

⁴⁵ David Meth to Gilbert Gude, 22 August 1972. Box 75, Folder 9, The Gilbert Gude papers, GWU Special Collections, The George Washington University.

⁴⁶ Smith, *Captive Capital*, 142.

⁴⁷ Jaffe and Sherwood, *Dream City*, 12.

chains. These figures are labeled, “D.C. Power Structure,” “Sen. Byrd W. VA,” and “Rep. McMillan S.C.” The capital building is placed just slightly in the background.⁴⁸ This flyer was circulated around 1966, even before President Johnson’s reorganization plan established an appointed mayor and council. Civil rights activists and home rule supporters recognized that the southern segregationists in power, like Senator Robert Byrd of West Virginia and Representative McMillan, were to blame for DC’s absence of rights. In numerous instances, McMillan claimed that he would not support home rule for the District of Columbia, citing Article 1, Section 8 of the Constitution that granted exclusive Congressional authority over Washington, DC.⁴⁹

A “Turning Point” and National Effort to Pass Home Rule

Then, in the months leading up to the 1972 South Carolina Democratic primary election, black leaders, under the direction of non-voting Representative Walter E. Fauntroy, held voter registration drives and were able to “primary” McMillan out of office, organizing black voters nationally.⁵⁰ For instance, one flyer read: “ATTENTION!! ALL SOUTH CAROLINIANS: If you are from one of the following counties in South Carolina...” It continued: “IF YOU HAVE FRIENDS OR RELATIVES IN THESE COUNTIES... LEARN HOW YOU CAN HELP FREE DC.” The contact listed was Walter E. Fauntroy.⁵¹ Although it is unknown how widely this flyer was circulated, it is obvious that Fauntroy’s intention was to target political leaders in these areas of South Carolina. If Congressmen, like Representative McMillan, were unwilling to support self-government in the District, they risked losing their seats to a newly organized black community.

⁴⁸ “In Chains 400 Years...And *Still* In Chains in D.C.,” ca. 1966. Box 6, Topical, D.C. Home Rule 1959-1972, Folder 215. John L. McMillan papers, Southern Carolina Political Collections, University of South Carolina.

⁴⁹ Gregory M. Borchardt, *Making D.C. Democracy’s Capital*, 244.

⁵⁰ Christopher Klemek, “Exceptionalism and the National Capital,” 20.

⁵¹ “Washington, DC Politics and Government.” Vertical Files, Box 30, The Historical Society of Washington, DC.

With McMillan out of Congress, a “turning point” came as Representative Charles C. Diggs, Jr., an African American Congressman from Michigan, seized control of the District of Columbia House Committee. Diggs reorganized the committee, creating a new Government Operations Subcommittee to draft bills that would be presented to the full committee.⁵² With this change in administration, Washingtonians regained a semblance of hope. An editorial in the *Minneapolis Tribune*, entitled “Good News for Washington,” explained, “With McMillan and his conservative Southern colleagues out of the way...America may be about to lose a colony. But if it does, it will gain some full-fledged citizens.”⁵³ Although Chairman McMillan’s loss was important to Washington, DC’s journey to home rule, Walter Fauntroy and Washingtonians needed to gain the support of the entire nation.

Although Walter E. Fauntroy, DC’s first elected member of Congress, was unable to vote on the House floor, his influence was widespread. As a member of the newly formed Congressional Black Caucus, an organization comprising of African American congressional leaders, Fauntroy led the group, which boasted less than twenty members in the early 1970s, to rally for home rule in Washington, DC. With what became known as the “Fauntroy strategy,” DC’s newly elected leader singled out congressional districts with a black population of 25 percent or more.⁵⁴ In a March 1973 chart, entitled, “Congressional Districts with 25 percent or more Black Population,” Fauntroy hired a research office to compile data that could aid the home rule fight. In each state listed, was also a list of Congressmen who had a black population of 25 percent or more in their district. Those who were not African American Congressmen were

⁵² “Congress Grants Nation’s Capital Limited Home Rule.” in *CQ Almanac* 1973, 29th ed., 734-771. Washington, DC: *Congressional Quarterly*.

⁵³ “Good News for Washington,” *Minneapolis Tribune*, 15 September 1972. Box 1, Folder 3, Committee on the District of Columbia House of Representatives papers, The Moorland- Spingarn Research Center, Howard University.

⁵⁴ Robert Singh, *The Congressional Black Caucus: Racial Politics in the U.S. Congress* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1998), 83.

highlighted in yellow. One notable figure listed and highlighted was John Rarick, a representative from Louisiana, who had been an open opponent of DC self-government for years.⁵⁵ It is evident that Fauntroy intended to use the statistics to threaten any member of Congress unwilling to support home rule, or if that representative refused to budge, the data could be used to organize the black communities in each district to unseat that delegate. Similarly, Fauntroy possessed another chart, entitled “Congressional Districts in Which the Black Voting Age Population is at Least Double the Congressman’s 1972 Margin of Victory.”⁵⁶ This chart would be useful in determining which areas would most easily be targeted as centers to aid the black population in voter registration in order to unseat opponents of DC self-determination. Both charts made one message very clear. If a Congressman did not support home rule by March 1973, he had better change his views quickly or risk losing his seat to an organized black Congressional community, and a newly formed black constituency.

While Fauntroy used research companies to compile data, he also maintained personal files on those representatives opposed to home rule. One such file was that on Louisiana Representative John Rarick. Within this file, there were expected categories such as his name, district number, state, and principal city, but other notable categories included “Black Population of District,” “Per Cent Black Population of District,” “Black Voting Age of District,” and “Per Cent Black Voting Age Population.” Also within the file, there was a contact list, accompanied by handwritten notes, of black leaders in Representative Rarick’s district.⁵⁷ Although the home

⁵⁵ “Congressional Districts with 25 percent or more Black Population,” March 1973. Box 45, Folder 17. The Walter E. Fauntroy papers, The George Washington University, Special Collections Research Center.

⁵⁶ “Congressional Districts in Which the Black Voting Age Population is at Least Double the Congressman’s 1972 Margin of Victory,” March 1973. Box 45, Folder 17, *The Walter E. Fauntroy papers*, The George Washington University, Special Collections Research Center.

⁵⁷ File on Congressman John R. Rarick. Box 45, Folder 9, *The Walter E. Fauntroy papers*, The George Washington University, Special Collections Research Center.

rule bill was able to pass without the support of John R. Rarick in 1973, Fauntroy was prepared with statistics and contacts to unseat the congressman by rallying black voters nationally.

The District of Columbia Home Rule Act: Only a Semblance of Self- Government

Easily passing in the Senate, the House of Representative finally debated, amended, and passed home rule legislation in October 1973. After a conference to debate discrepancies between the Senate's S. 1435 and the House's H.R. 9682, President Nixon signed the District of Columbia Self-Government and Governmental Reorganization Act into law on December 24, 1973. On Christmas Eve 1973, Nixon expressed his enduring support for DC home rule and stated, "The District of Columbia is a unique combination of Federal and local concerns, each of which must be satisfied. All in all, I believe this legislation skillfully balances the local interest and the national interest in the way the District of Columbia is governed."⁵⁸ President Nixon and members of Congress were proud to grant home rule for DC, but some Washingtonians remained skeptical about the quality of self- government this bill provided.

In reality, the home rule bill was able to pass in 1973 because it granted only a limited form of self-government to Washingtonians, retaining the political power of Congressional authority. "The heart of the success of the bill," Smith concluded, in 1974, "was that it did not provide home rule."⁵⁹ Although the Senate version gave more local authority to the District of Columbia, many of the provisions, adopted in Public Law 93-198, were from the weaker House bill. While Washingtonians could elect their own mayor and a 13-member council and continued to receive payments from the federal government, the home rule bill also specified that Congress retained line-item Congressional authority over the city's budget, that the president could control

⁵⁸ Richard M. Nixon, "District of Columbia Self-Government and Governmental Reorganization Act: Statement by the President," 24 December 1973. *ProQuest Congressional* database. Accessed 15 September 2015.

⁵⁹ Smith, *Captive Capital*, 164-165.

the DC police force in the case of an emergency, and provided no additional power to the District of Columbia in Congress.⁶⁰ Before its passage, two amendments were also adopted that further weakened the bill. Representative Edith Green, a Democrat from Oregon, proposed an amendment that established a “federal enclave,” with an appointed director to oversee municipal affairs in an area of federal buildings. The other amendment, proposed by William H. Harsha, a Republican from Ohio, granted the president the right to appoint the city’s judges.⁶¹ Both amendments represent Congress’ unwillingness to completely relinquish its exclusive jurisdiction over the District of Columbia. While the DC Home Rule Act granted Washingtonians the right to elect their own mayor and council, Congress did not relinquish its power over the federal budget and yielded no further congressional power to the district, providing severely limited home rule in Washington, DC.

Under this home rule legislation, Walter E. Washington, the incumbent mayor-commissioner of the city, was elected to be mayor in early 1974. Despite growing African American leadership, many less affluent, black Washingtonians felt that Mayor Washington neglected inner city areas, and social tensions persisted.⁶²

Conclusions: The Struggle for Self- Government Remains

Washingtonians were finally granted limited self- government in 1973 only when home rule was understood as a national responsibility to end racial injustice in the nation’s capital. One significant factor that caused Congress to strip Washingtonians of their voting rights in the capital was the white fear of the newly enfranchised African American population that flooded to the capital at the end of the Civil War. By 1970, African Americans made up 71% of Washington’s population, and therefore the struggle became increasingly racial. With the fall of

⁶⁰ "Congress Grants Nation's Capital Limited Home Rule." in *CQ Almanac* 1973, 7.

⁶¹ *Ibid*, 6.

⁶² Gillette, *Between Justice and Beauty*, 191.

Chairman McMillan from leadership of the House Committee on the District of Columbia, however, DC home rule was finally allowed a chance on the House floor. Although local newspapers had recognized congressional racism and supported home rule for decades prior to its passage, self-government was only granted to DC when Washington's non-voting delegate to Congress took charge. With the help of the newly formed Congressional Black Caucus, Walter E. Fauntroy led Washingtonians to home rule by threatening those Congressman who did not explicitly support the home rule bill. When Fauntroy's strategy proved successful and DC was finally granted home rule in December 1973, this self-government was severely limited, ensuring continued congressional authority in the nation's capital.

Although the issue of self-government has become less racially charged, today, Washingtonians, led by non-voting delegate Eleanor Holmes Norton, continuously call for more representation in Congress. In response to a Congressman's interruption in 2007, Representative Holmes Norton famously proclaimed, "I will not yield, sir! The District of Columbia has spent 206 years yielding to people who would deny them the vote."⁶³ This incident occurred as Holmes Norton argued in favor of a DC Voting Rights Act that would have granted the House representative the right to vote on the House floor. Without legitimate rights in Congress, Washington, DC has continued yield to the nation. In another recent event, significant to home rule, President Obama announced that the presidential limousines would use the DC license plates that bear the phrase "taxation without representation."⁶⁴ Like Truman, Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon, President Obama demonstrates support for self-government in DC, yet, without national action, no progress will be made. The 1973 District of Columbia Home Rule Act, the

⁶³ Nancy Pelosi. "Delegate Holmes Norton: DC Voting Right Act," *YouTube* video, 1:46, April 19, 2007. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VV3k8nERUOQ>.

⁶⁴ Tim Craig, "Obama to use D.C. 'taxation without representation license plates,'" *The Washington Post* (Washington, DC), January 15, 2013.

culmination of a century long struggle, granted only a limited home rule that still suffocates the nation's capital today.

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