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COMMUNITY POLICING IN THE NATION’S CAPITAL, 1968-1973

New exhibition examines short-lived Pilot District Project, 50 years later

In response to the assassination of the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., anger that had mounted over decades of racism, discrimination, and inequality erupted into destruction in several D.C. neighborhoods. The “riot corridors,” as they were later known, included portions of 14th St. NW, H St. NE, and 7th St. NW—at the time, all predominantly African American neighborhoods. President Johnson’s administration funded a pilot program to ease tensions between predominantly white police and a low-income African American community.

The Pilot District Project (PDP) launched in the summer of 1968 with broad goals for police reform and citizen participation. The city’s Third District (now most of Ward 1) was chosen as the pilot location. Although the PDP faced criticism from some District residents—resentful of attempts by white government officials to exert control over black neighborhoods—they were active in public meetings and campaigned for positions on the advisory board. The exhibition features posters and materials from these campaigns, including those for Marion Barry and his People’s Party, who took 16 of the 28 possible board seats in the first election.

The project enacted several important innovations during its five-year run, including 24-hour police stations, citizen ride-alongs, and a series of bulletin boards to share information about police work. The program also introduced police sensitivity training. Materials from all of these projects will be on display. Further connections between the PDP and other community projects will illuminate the context of activism in the capital city, then and now. The exhibition introduces visitors to this compelling and timely story of urban policing, community participation and resilience, federal intervention, and a program with good intentions that perhaps was never up to its herculean task.

PRESS PREVIEW
A press preview will be held on Tuesday, April 3 at 10 am. Sarah Leavitt, National Building Museum curator, Anne McDonough, library and collections director for the Historical Society of Washington, D.C., and Amber N. Wiley, Ph.D., assistant professor of American Studies at Skidmore College, will be available for questions.

IMAGES
Hi-res scans of selected documents are available at go.nbm.org/PDPpress.
ABOUT THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF WASHINGTON, D.C.
The Historical Society of Washington, D.C., is a community supported educational and research organization that collects, interprets, and shares the history of our nation’s capital. Founded in 1894, the Historical Society serves a diverse audience through its collections, public programs, exhibitions, and publications. The Historical Society’s research library is temporarily located at the Newseum, 555 Pennsylvania Avenue NW, while its home, the historic Carnegie Library at Mt. Vernon Square, is undergoing restoration. To support exhibitions and related programming at the Historical Society and to learn more visit dchistory.org.

ABOUT THE NATIONAL BUILDING MUSEUM
The National Building Museum is America’s leading cultural institution dedicated to advancing the quality of the built environment by educating people about its impact on their lives. Through its exhibitions, educational programs, web content, and publications, the Museum has become a vital forum for the exchange of ideas and information about the world we build for ourselves. Public inquiries: 202.272.2448 or visit www.nbm.org. Connect with us on Twitter and Facebook.

Photo: Local activists picket the home of the PDP director to protest federal overreach. Courtesy Historical Society of Washington, D.C.

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