CHAPTER 3

AN EXPERIMENTAL NEIGHBORHOOD MUSEUM

SOMETHING NEW IN ANACOSTIA

African American influences permeate every aspect of American life. The clothing we wear, the songs we sing, the dances we dance, the music we compose, the food we eat, the technology we use, the way we speak, the manner in which we style our hair, the high-five handshake, even the intense American love affair with a suntanned skin—all these attest to a deeply ingrained and powerful presence among us. When the Smithsonian decided to place an experimental drop-in center in this neighborhood, it could not know then what is apparent now: the African American presence had the capacity to affect and influence eminent institutions that chart the historical and cultural development of our society.

—Zora Martin-Felton, 1992

In 1967 the Smithsonian Institution opened a small, experimental museum in an abandoned neighborhood theater east of the Anacostia River. The experiment was designed to bring cultural resources to people who, for whatever reasons, did not visit the museums on the National Mall. The new entity would serve as a bridge between the community and the established, traditional museums downtown.

According to Julian Euell, an early planning consultant to the Smithsonian Institution who later became the Smithsonian's assistant secretary for public service and, hence, John Kinard's supervisor, Kinard was not the first candidate considered as head of the proposed experimental museum. Euell recalls interviewing several "education types"—strong, qualified people—but not what the Smithsonian was looking for in the early developmental stages.[1]

Caryl Marsh, a founder of the museum and the initial planning and development consultant for the Smithsonian, held a number of exploratory discussions with Southeast residents. To head the museum, they wanted someone who "knows the community and who would know what teenagers and adults would like; someone who is worldly, but feels comfortable talking to all kinds of people."[2]

The position seemed tailor-made for John Kinard, who in 1967 was with the Office of Economic Opportunity. He had traveled miles since his work with Operation Crossroads Africa. For three months from November 1964 to January 1965 he served as a contract escort-interpreter for African diplomats invited to the United States by the U.S. Department of State. Then, in February 1965, he became one of the first ten organizers with the Southeast Neighborhood Development Program, an antipoverty program operated by the Southeast Neighborhood House at 2263 Mount View Place, S.E. This location was just around the corner from the future site of the Anacostia Neighborhood Museum.

Julian Euell, assistant secretary for public service, Smithsonian Institution, and John Kinard's immediate supervisor. *Courtesy Smithsonian Institution Archives*

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An Antipoverty Program Experience

John Kinard had great cause to agonize over the welfare of many of his neighbors living east of the Anacostia River. Complex, sometimes overwhelming problems, such as poor housing, high unemployment, inadequate schools, and too few municipal services, afflicted many in his community. These were areas around which he would later focus the museum's exhibitions and programs to stimulate informed dialogue.

Kinard worked with the Band of Angels, a group of angry, activist welfare mothers. He named and helped counsel the Rebels with a Cause, a dozen or so street-savvy black "disadvantaged" teenagers from a nearby public housing project. He honed his negotiating skills—and his patience—during long hours of heated discussions in endless meetings with other community organizers, neighborhood residents, and officials from both the public and private sectors.

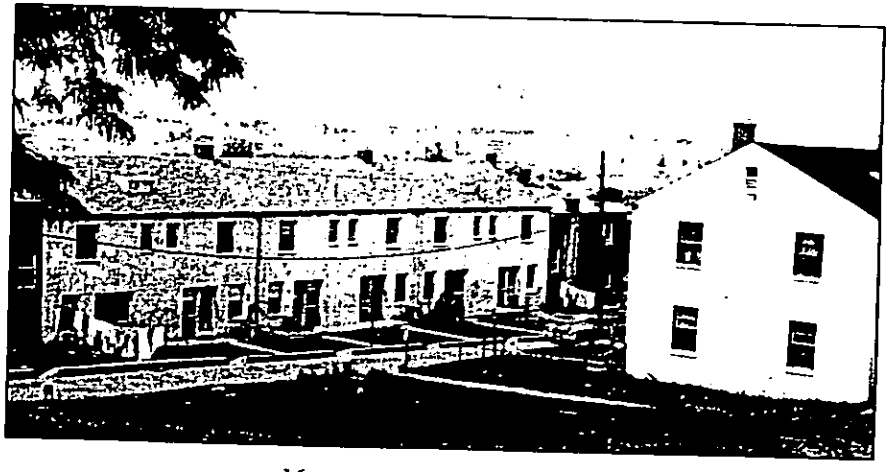
Even back then, people listened when John Kinard spoke, for he articulated his positions with clarity and logic and the force of a black preacher's passion and imagery. He appealed to listeners' reason as well as their sense of moral responsibility simply to do what was right.

More than twenty-five years ago at a meeting in the Bridge, the Southeast Neighborhood Development Program's cultural arts center at 2027 Nichols (now Martin Luther King, Jr.) Avenue, S.E., Kinard listened for a long time as other staff members and community residents debated strategies to increase the effectiveness of the community organizers. He bided his time and eventually stood to say that he wished to make a suggestion. His statement took probably less than ten minutes, but in that short time Kinard argued with riveting intensity and power for a dramatic new direction. He wanted to know why the Southeast Neighborhood Development Program continued to dilute its efforts by scattering workers and trying to respond to every call for assistance throughout the entire service area. The program should, he argued, focus the energies of a small group of workers in one definable area such as the Barry Farms public housing project. After all, he continued, the social, political, and economic ills

The old location of the Southeast Neighborhood House administration building and day care wing, 1992

of the more than four hundred families living in Barry Farms were the same as those found in similar areas throughout the whole city and even the country. If the program could help these residents to effect basic changes in their small community, it could then provide possible solutions for others in much the same circumstances. Kinard concluded by recommending that the Neighborhood House "target Barry Farms."[3]

In just minutes, John Kinard had summed up the dilemma faced by exhausted organizers and at the same time offered an idea that met the enthusiastic approval of those present. During the following week the Barry Farms Target Team, which included Kinard, was



Barry Farms public housing project, ca. 1976, much as it looked ten years earlier when Kinard was a member of the Barry Farms Target Team

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organized. The team was an all-male group of nine blacks and one white, led by a young social worker, Pharnal Longus. Partly because of its efforts in Barry Farms, the Southeast Neighborhood House became known as one of the most militant—and one of the most effective—antipoverty programs in the city.

For two years Kinard refined his skills in community service. While he continued his connection with the Barry Farms Target Team from 1965 to 1966, he also worked with youths at the neighborhood house and became a counselor with the Neighborhood Youth Corps. For about nine months he opted to become a community organizer for a second antipoverty program, the Congress Heights Neighborhood Development Program, also in Southeast Washington. Then, in June 1966, he moved on to a year's stint with the U.S. Office of Economic Opportunity as a program analyst assigned to eight counties along Maryland's Eastern Shore.

The Experiment Begins

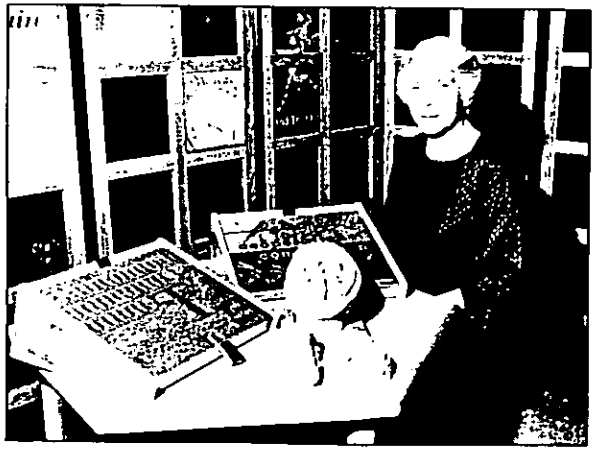
Soon after Kinard joined the Office of Economic Opportunity, the Smithsonian Institution decided to establish a "storefront" or neighborhood museum somewhere in the nation's capital. Most local people first learned about the Smithsonian's interest in storefront museums through newspaper accounts in November 1966. One article referred to detailed remarks by Smithsonian Secretary S. Dillon Ripley in September 1966 before a group of museum professionals in Aspen, Colorado, who were examining ways to increase the effective use of museums.

Ripley wished to place an informal, experimental museum in a low-income neighborhood for the nontraditional visitor who rarely, if ever, visited the imposing museums anywhere in the city. It was Ripley's hope that, once introduced to an interesting, hands-on museum in their neighborhood, residents would be more inclined to visit the National Mall.

Charles Blitzer, director of the Smithsonian's Office of Education and Training, was appointed to head the effort. He, in turn, hired Caryl Marsh, a psychologist with the District of Columbia Department of Recreation and Parks. Marsh, already closely allied with the city's Roving Leader Program, began meeting with community groups to test the level of support the Smithsonian might expect in various neighborhoods. By November 1966 she had drafted the original funding request to establish "an experimental neighborhood museum" in the District of Columbia.[3]

Dr. Ripley's insistence on a low-income neighborhood as the site for the experimental museum accounted in large measure for the selection of a location in Southeast Washington. Caryl Marsh recalls a rainy morning in late 1966 when she drove Blitzer and Ripley to Anacostia to urge them to select the Carver Theater on Nichols Avenue. Already considered and rejected had been sites in Northwest Washington in the Adams Morgan section and the lower Georgia Avenue area. Certainly there was a predominance of low-

S. Dillon Ripley, Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution from 1964 to 1984. *Courtesy Smithsonian Institution Office of the*



Caryl Marsh, one of the founders of Anacostia Neighborhood Museum. A psychologist and formerly a consultant to the

income households in some neighborhoods east of the Anacostia River. These same areas, with burgeoning youth populations, were also sadly neglected by city officials. Ripley addressed this concern when he noted that, while "the concept of bringing a museum out of its stated setting is not new," he felt that all of the current outreach efforts of museums "overlooked urban areas.... The urban area is upon us and beats on our ears or flashes from shattered storefronts every day." If people from "disadvantaged" areas are unwilling or unable to come to museums, he said, "then the only solution is to bring the museum to them. For of all of our people, these are the ones who most deserve to have the fun of seeing, of being in a museum."[6]

Newspapers of the period describe Anacostia as a forgotten, isolated, and deprived section of the city. The area was considered volatile and apt to erupt again in a civil disturbance, such as that which occurred just before Ripley spoke in Colorado. During that incident, youth and adults marched on the local police station and the police authorities in Anacostia made the inflammatory decision to use dogs to control the crowds.[7] Soon to come was the so-called Anacostia Suit, a class-action lawsuit filed by citizens in an effort to force the city to regulate land use, administer housing programs, and provide citizens living east of the river with the same adequate and essential services enjoyed by residents in the other three quadrants of the city.

Kinard *(second from right)* sharing a light moment in front of the Anacostia Neighborhood Museum, ca. 1969, with *(l-r)*: U.S. Supreme Court Justice Abe Fortas, an unidentified visitor, and museum founders Alton M. Jones and Stanley J. Anderson

Anacostia not only met Ripley's criteria as a low-income neighborhood; it also possessed citizens who cared deeply about their community and were willing to take active steps to improve it. The Greater Anacostia People's Corporation, a strong citizens' group, played a major role in the negotiations to bring the proposed Smithsonian museum to Anacostia. Several of its members were most responsible for marshaling community support for the museum. Foremost among them was Stanley J. Anderson, director of the Roving Leader Program of the D.C. Department of Recreation and Parks, who was later appointed to the D.C. City Council by President Lyndon B. Johnson. Working with him were Almore Marcus Dale (1909–1984), supervisor of student accounts at Howard University; Marion Conover Hope (1902–1974), a certified social worker and an educator who was the first headworker of the Southeast Neighborhood House when it opened in 1929 at 324 Virginia Avenue, S.E.; and Alton M. Jones, social services program analyst for the U.S.

Museum founder Almore Marcus Dale

Department of Health and Human Services. Later they would constitute the core leadership of the museum's Neighborhood Advisory Committee. When the museum opened, the committee numbered nearly one hundred persons from the local and wider communities, including museum and Smithsonian Institution staff members. Together they defined what the museum would be, making certain it responded to the needs and desires of the community. By 1973, the Neighborhood Advisory Committee incorporated itself, becoming the museum's Board of Directors.

During his tenure, Kinard worked with five chairpersons: Alton M. Jones, Stanley J. Anderson, Alice B. Finlayson, the late John W. Blake, and Edith Shepard. Cynthia Clark Matthews was elected in 1989 after Kinard's death; Theresa Howe Jones currently serves as board chairperson. In later years Kinard frequently recalled the efforts of those on the initial advisory board. Of the founders of the museum (Blitzer and Marsh of the Smithsonian, and Anderson, Dale, Hope, and Jones of the local

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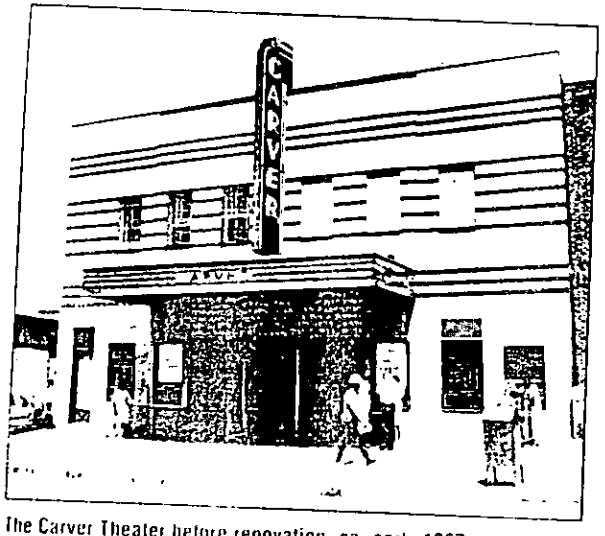
neighborhood), he said: "The founders of the Anacostia Neighborhood Museum in years to come can look back and be thankful. They did the best they could with what they had to insure for their community a place in the history of men. Their dedicated concern was not for themselves or an act of selfish aggrandizement. It was for the people of Anacostia and ultimately the world over."[6]

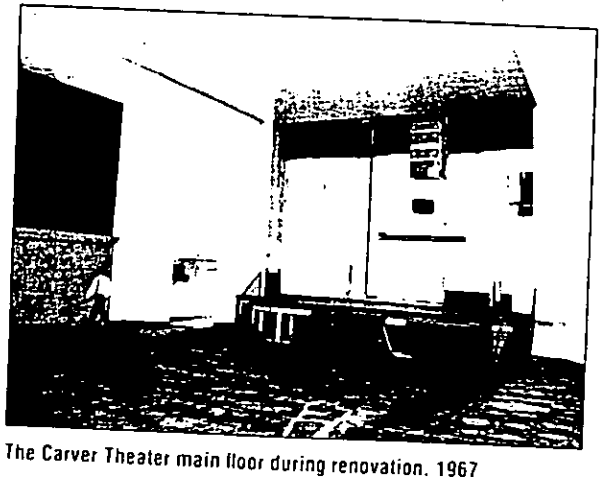
The Carver Theater Renovation

Although the original "storefront" label persisted for some time, neighborhood residents insisted from the beginning on a building worthy of the Smithsonian affiliation. The old 5,000-square foot Carver Theater at 2405 Nichols Avenue, S.E., had also served the community as a dance hall, skating rink, and church. It rested comfortably between Cooper's Restaurant and the Potomac Electric Power Company (PEPCO) substation with its enormous transformers providing electricity to community residents. In 1967 the theater lay abandoned and vandalized. That spring, however, the Smithsonian negotiated a lease with the owners, and on April 1, 1967, the gas, water, and electric meter accounts began to be charged to the Smithsonian.[7] The late Jerald Shelton of the National Museum of History and Technology (now the National Museum of American History) created an award-winning design plan. The transformation of the theater had begun.

Neighborhood teenagers, including a group called the Trail Blazers, directed by the D.C. Department of Recreation and Parks, as well as adults and museum staff, worked side by side with Smithsonian technicians, designers, curators, illustrators, exhibits specialists, painters, carpenters, and electricians. The theater's slanted floor was elevated and leveled by placing industrial-strength tiles on heavy metal jacks. New electrical, heating, and plumbing systems were installed. Interior and exterior painting, carpeting, landscaping—all these tasks were accomplished in record-setting time.[8]



The Carver Theater before renovation, ca. early 1967



The Carver Theater main floor during renovation, 1967

The new director supervising several Trail Blazers as they ready the Carver Theater for the new museum, summer 1967

Left Kinard presenting Marion Conover Hope with a plaque at the Gospel Truth program, September 1970. In 1967, Hope, a founder and advocate of the Anacostia Neighborhood Museum, urged John Kinard to accept the position of director. In the background is the ambassador of Ghana, Ebenezer Moses Debrah.

Right Director Kinard in front of the renovated Carver Theater, the site of the Anacostia Neighborhood Museum from 1967 to 1987

Kinard liked to say that it was the late Marion Conover Hope who most influenced—probably pressured—him into applying for the position of director of the new neighborhood museum:

> *She launched me in this whole museum project....She asked me all kinds of questions, like "What do you think about black power?" "What is your experience?" and "What are your ideas?" So we had a long discussion before she opened up this museum thing. So she said, "We want you to be director of this museum." I told her, "Look, I don't even go to museums, don't even know a thing about museums, and it's the most remote thing in my mind."* [1]

Yielding to Hope's urgings, Kinard agreed to an interview with S. Dillon Ripley, secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, and Charles Blitzer, director of the Smithsonian's Office of Education and Training. Kinard greatly impressed them and was selected on the spot. "Perhaps the best news of all is that we have found a director, John Kinard, who is superbly suited to the job," wrote Blitzer. "As you will see from his resume, he has everything from academic training, through very practical experience in the field, to thorough familiarity with Anacostia and its problems. He will begin work full time on July 1st, but is already deeply involved in the affairs of the neighborhood museum." [2]

Kinard was hired officially to begin on July 1, 1967, at a salary of $11,306. [3] Because there was no precedent for a neighborhood museum, Kinard's job description was unlike any previously developed for a Smithsonian museum director. The most important qualification was "a demonstrated ability to organize and maintain community activities." In addition to community organization skills, it was desirable that the director possess "mechanical or artistic ability." The description further read, "Since it is anticipated that the programs of the Neighborhood Museum will involve active visitor participation, the ability to show or explain 'how things work' is highly desirable." [4]

Charles Blitzer handed John Kinard the keys to the Carver Theater on July 5, 1967. Only two and one-half months remained before the scheduled opening of the museum. Kinard's work had just begun.

Charles Blitzer, former director of the Smithsonian's Office of Education and Training and now director of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 1992. Blitzer hired John Kinard as first director of the Anacostia Neighborhood Museum.

Opening Friday, S

Chapter 4

"ONE LEAP IN THE DARK"
Clearing the Hurdles

A person ought to, if he has a chance, take one leap in the dark with his life.
—John Kinard, recalling 1967

Opening night ceremonies for the Anacostia Neighborhood Museum, Friday, September 15, 1967

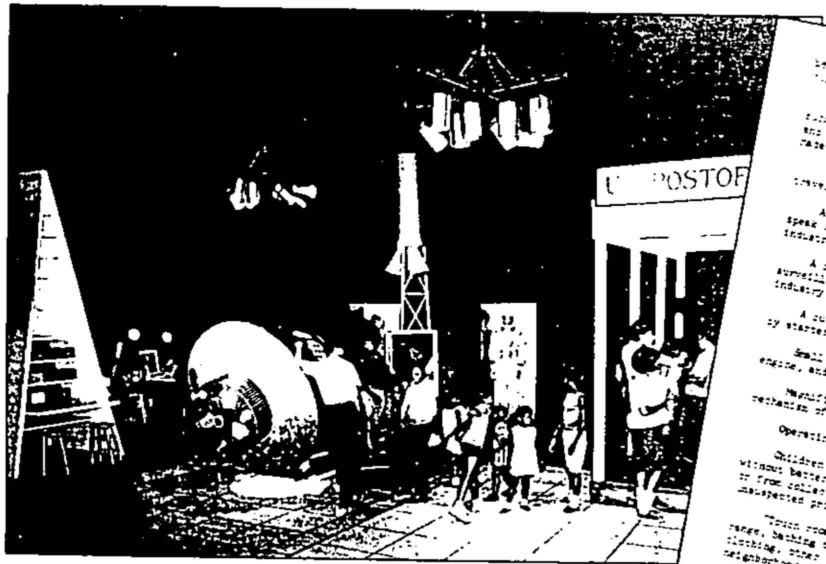

Director Kinard cutting the ribbon to open the new Anacostia Neighborhood Museum, September 15, 1967. Actor and cultural activist Robert Hooks looks on.

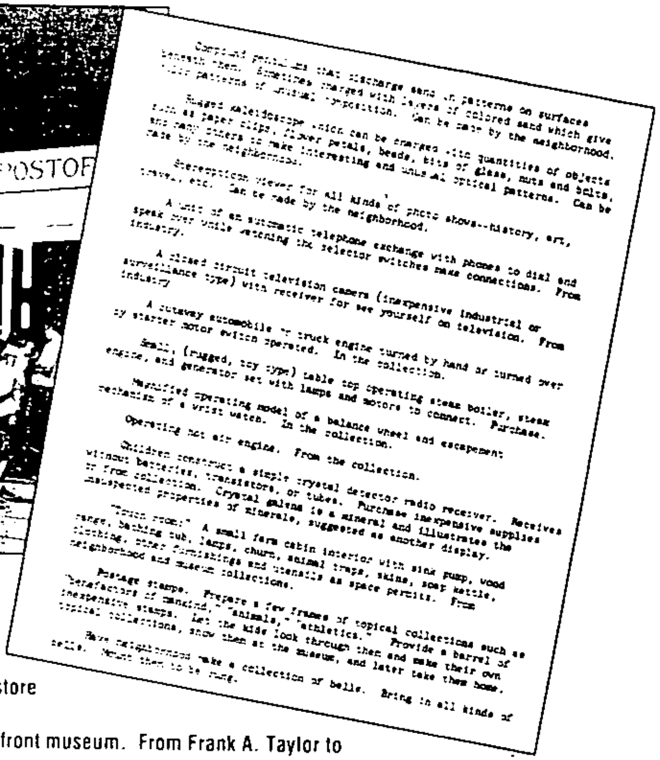
From the moment that nearby neighbors learned of the museum's coming, a dramatic change began to occur along "the Avenue." PEPCO landscaped its grounds and erected a new fence. Edward L. Cooper, like many other merchants, painted the exterior of his restaurant and waited impatiently for the increased business he knew the museum's presence would bring.

When the museum opened on Friday, September 15, 1967, thousands jammed Nichols Avenue to hear the bands play and the speakers tell of their expectations for the small museum, to tour the facility, and to savor the endless supply of cookies and punch. Secretary S. Dillon Ripley's opening remarks proved more prophetic than anyone there could have imagined: "I believe that the opening of the Anacostia Neighborhood Museum is truly an important event in the history of museums....I suspect that museums will never quite be the same again."[1]

Stable Funding

Primarily through the efforts of Caryl Marsh, the museum secured $75,000, mainly from the Carnegie Corporation of New York, the Ann S. Richardson Fund, and the Meyer Foundation, to fund its operations through the first year. In early 1968 Smithsonian officials realized that the museum's costs would exceed that sum, and they were successful in getting a challenge, or





Compound pendulums that discharge sand in patterns on surfaces beneath them. Sometimes charged with layers of colored sand which give their patterns of unusual composition. Can be made by the neighborhood.

Rugged kaleidoscope which can be charged with quantities of objects such as paper clips, flower petals, beads, bits of glass, nuts and bolts, and many others to make interesting and unusual optical patterns. Can be made by the neighborhood.

Stereopticon viewer for all kinds of photo shows--history, art, travel, etc. Can be made by the neighborhood.

A unit of an automatic telephone exchange with phones to dial and speak over while watching the selector switches make connections. From industry.

A closed circuit television camera (inexpensive industrial or surveillance type) with receiver for see yourself on television. From industry

A cutaway automobile or truck engine turned by hand or turned over by starter motor switch operated. In the collection.

Small, (rugged, toy type) table top operating steam boiler, steam engine, and generator set with lamps and motors to connect. Purchase.

Magnified operating model of a balance wheel and escapement mechanism of a wrist watch. In the collection.

Operating hot air engine. From the collection.

Children construct a simple crystal detector radio receiver. Receives without batteries, transistors, or tubes. Purchase inexpensive supplies or from collection. Crystal galena is a mineral and illustrates the unsuspected properties of minerals, suggested as another display.

"[illegible] room:" A small farm cabin interior with sink pump, wood range, bathing tub, lamps, churn, animal traps, skins, soap kettle, clothing, other furnishings and utensils as space permits. From neighborhood and museum collections.

Postage stamps. Prepare a few frames of topical collections such as "benefactors of mankind," "animals," "athletics." Provide a barrel of inexpensive stamps. Let the kids look through them and make their own topical collections, show them at the museum, and later take them home.

Have neighborhood make a collection of bells. Bring in all kinds of bells. Mount them to be rung.

Above Opening exhibits at the Anacostia Neighborhood Museum, 1967. The six exhibit units included a full-scale mock-up of a Mercury space capsule; "shoebox" exhibits for elementary and preschool children; a "bone room" with skeletons on display; a closed-circuit television camera and monitor; a small zoo (until May 1970); and an 1890s country store and post office (until February 1971). *Courtesy Baltimore Sun*

Right Smithsonian staff suggestions for exhibits and displays for the storefront museum. From Frank A. Taylor to Charles Blitzer, memorandum, 27 October 1966

matching, grant from the Irwin-Sweeney-Miller Foundation for $21,000.[7] When the museum's fund-raising drive to match this grant ended, one-third, or about $7,000, had been raised by neighborhood residents who contributed some sums as small as 25 or 50 cents.

Later many individuals—including Polly Shackleton, District of Columbia councilperson, and Peggy Goldstein, prominent local sculptor—garnered significant monetary or human resources for the museum. Over the years, however, Caryl Marsh continued to spearhead the museum's search for funds among corporations and foundations.

Beginning in 1969 the museum cleared a major hurdle when its budget was included in the Smithsonian's federal allocation. Although museum staff and supporters would still need to seek private grants, they could now plan for the future with a measure of stability previously absent. The Anacostia Museum's annual budget currently exceeds $1 million.

Smithsonian Personnel Policies and Practices

As John Kinard began his frequent trips to the Smithsonian offices on the National Mall—to pick up supplies or to hold discussions—he began to be even more aware of his singular status as well as the lack of minorities among the institution's professional ranks. James ("Jim") Mayo, a former Smithsonian employee who returned in 1967 as the only Anacostia Neighborhood Museum staff member with prior museum experience, asserts that at the time the museum opened, "The Smithsonian had never produced anything [a major exhibition] on African American history and culture.... There were no black curators in the Smithsonian.... There was one African curator [Dr. Edward

James Mayo, special assistant to the director, Anacostia Museum, 1992

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Ayensu, a botanist]...but he didn't have anything to do with history and culture." James A. Piper, a former exhibits preparator at the National Museum of Natural History, remembers Nathaniel Dixon, an African American, who was then head of the Smithsonian's education office. Other than Dixon, Piper says the highest-ranking blacks were designers.[3]

The absence of African American curators meant that Ripley's early request for ideas for exhibits at the new museum resulted in "absolutely nothing...that came close to African American history and culture," according to Mayo. African American history and culture were "not a part of what people [Smithsonian curators] thought about and what they dreamed about. They dreamed about spaceships, and airplanes, and trains, and whistles, and whatever."[4]

James A. Piper, retired Smithsonian exhibits preparator and designer, 1992

As a consequence, John Kinard made Smithsonian personnel practices, the training and hiring of minorities, and the accurate presentation of African American history among his highest priorities. Throughout his tenure as Anacostia's director, he pushed for more inclusive exhibits and for increased hiring and training opportunities for minorities, even testifying on the matter before a congressional committee in 1989. Late in his career, in a letter to the secretary of the Smithsonian, Robert McC. Adams, Kinard was still lobbying hard for equity in Smithsonian hiring practices and policies.[5]

Education Programs

From the very beginning, John Kinard wanted no misunderstanding: the Anacostia Museum was to be open to the entire community. And the "community" encompassed the Nation of Islam, housing and economic development groups, antimethadone organizations, both the "inside" and "outside" chapters of the Inner Voices of Lorton Reformatory, and bands, acrobatic groups, and dance troupes seeking rehearsal space. The museum was the community's, and it was full of life from early morning until often after midnight. The only dissonant voice came from the loud resident parrot named George, whose insistence on participating in meetings and concerts frequently got him relegated to one of the restrooms.

STYLE People / The Arts /

MONDAY, OCTOBER 12, 1970

Top: **The Inner Voices dramatic company from Lorton Reformatory.** *© 1970 The Washington Post. Reprinted with permission*
Bottom: **Performance at the Anacostia Neighborhood Museum by a percussion group.** *Courtesy Aftenposten*

Kinard insisted on museum programs that would attract a wide spectrum of the community. One week before the museum opening, he hired Zora B. Martin (now Zora Martin-Felton), an Anacostia resident who had served as the Southeast Neighborhood House director of education and group work while Kinard was

Zora Martin-Felton, chief of the Education Department, conducting her flannel board talk, "How and Why Africans Came to America," for Black History Month, 1980

there, to direct the museum's educational programs. She recalls Kinard's telling her in the fall of 1967 that he wanted a program in the museum every night during Black History Month. Felton then proceeded to plan a full menu of lectures, concerts, poetry readings, skits and plays, and a variety of other programs for that February. People—not only from the immediate neighborhood but from all over the city—jammed the museum every night. Mindful of the wide range of visitors to the museum, the museum's staff "attempted to develop programs that are far-ranging and have broad appeal. . . . A basic premise is that people learn in different ways; that, while the exhibit mechanism is sufficient for some, for others there is a need to present panel discussions, workshops, seminars, and forums and to make full use of the performing arts." [6]

Almost a dozen preschool programs had sites nearby, and many of them made daily visits to the museum. Thus the education staff felt obligated to develop programming for a very young audience as well as for older children, teenagers, and adults. Amina J. Dickerson, a former director of Chicago's DuSable Museum of African American History and the current director of the Elizabeth F. Cheney Center for Education and Public Programs for the Chicago Historical Society, recalls:

> *I can remember some of the early works, which are now standard, focused on local history for young people—pre-K through first or second grade. . . . A process of community collaboration in the development of those materials was a process that others came to much later on. The idea that we would create an advisory committee, that we would listen to the needs of educators that are working in the trenches—all of that was something that happened out of Anacostia that influenced not only African American communities but the larger artistic community as well.* [7]

Schroeder Cherry, a former member of the education staff, now the director of education at the Baltimore Museum of Art, adds:

> *I was interested in getting involved with a museum that was educationally oriented and very active in its learning approach. So Anacostia was a pretty exciting place for me. It seemed less pristine and was much more accessible. . . . It was involved with the neighborhood. . . . We also had relationships [with] the teachers. . . . So that they looked at the museum as a learning resource. Now today, other museums are getting at that, but this was a primary focus of the Anacostia Museum from the start.* [8]

In 1969 the Junior League of Washington awarded the museum more than $40,000 to purchase a bright blue van and employ an educator-driver to conduct an outreach program. The Mobile Division, as it was called, was run by native Anacostian Ahmed Mbalia (Fletcher Smith). It enabled the museum to take portable exhibits, artifacts, speakers, and hands-on educational kits to schools, hospitals, playgrounds, public housing quadrangles, libraries, government agencies, and other facilities. Additionally, a videotape program documented museum programs and meetings and activities in the community. Although Mbalia points out that the concept was not unique, what was different was "the delivery of an intangible

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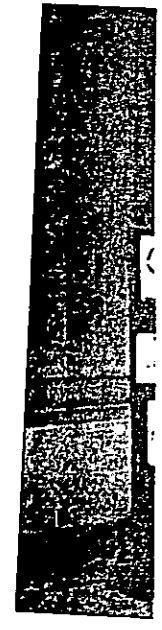
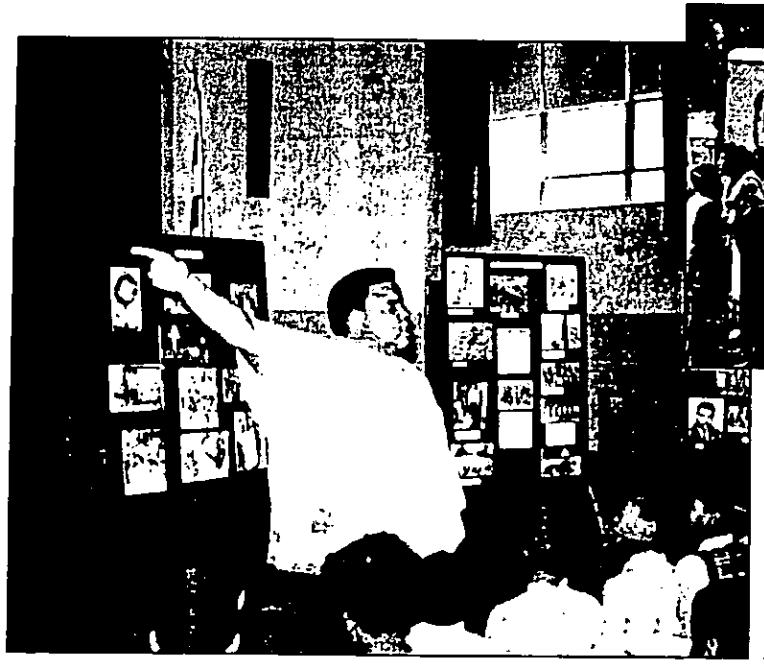


item that many label 'pride.'... Young as well as old could begin to drink from the waters of self-worth, a thirst long denied." [9] The Mobile Division's lending library of black book collections encouraged a number of school libraries to expand their collections of African American literature.

Partly in response to the demand for young peoples' educational programs, the education staff created the Children's Room, an informal learning area to which neighborhood children flocked each day after school and on weekends. It was also an area in which the staff developed experimental programs for later export to schools and other museums.

The openness of the museum fostered the growth of many fledgling performing groups. Some who had never performed before an audience made their debut on the stage of the museum. Adults as well as children participated in museum programs. With the latter, the Young People's Festival of the Arts brought choirs, drama and dance groups, and bands and orchestras from all over the metropolitan area. Others learned new skills and engaged in activities ranging from pottery making to some of the finer details of exhibits installation. Deborah ("Debbie") Jones, a member of the museum's Youth Advisory Council, remembers that they "learned to do all of the demonstrations in the Children's Room, which, incidentally, we helped plan and physically put together." These young people were on hand to "help with the tours and demonstrate how to make butter, soap, taffy, candles, and ice cream. [In 1972], again, we are silk-screening our original black Christmas cards to sell for our Travel Fund." [10]



Above: **The museum's "jitney bus," purchased with funds from the Junior League of Washington**

Left: **Outreach coordinator Ahmed Mbalia (Fletcher Smith) presenting a portable exhibit at a nearby school, early 1970s. The museum's Mobile Division van took exhibits and books to sites throughout the Washington area.** *Both photographs by Zora Martin-Felton*

The museum's education programs not only drew the community to the museum but reached out to the community and changed it. A black Santa Claus landed by helicopter in downtown Anacostia or came by horse and wagon to King Avenue and was greeted by Darrold White's Anacostia Senior High School band, pom pom girls, majorettes, and two thousand hysterical children. This was enough to prompt some commercial establishments to see the value of considering the racial factor in their own selection of Santa Clauses. An enthusiastic group of community residents, educators, activists, and museum staff combined to promote an African American holiday called Kwanza (now Kwanzaa). Lively and informative programs and the museum's much-copied Kwanza Kit grew out of this collaboration. The museum's focus on the inner-city environment was evidenced by educational materials, an exhibition on rats planned by local children, teens, and adults, and a museum-school urban garden project, which helped inspire the development of an Afrocentric Dr. George Washington Carver Nature Trail with its accompanying walks and projected kits.

The museum staff worked with community people and local educators to test publications and programs in the museum and in local classrooms. *How to Turn Your Classroom into a Museum* and a children's *A Walk through "Old" Anacostia* were especially popular, as was a participatory flannel board kit called "How and Why Africans Came to America." These and other publications and programs were soon exported to museums and schools throughout the country.

Museum staff members constantly sought to expand the museum's audiences through community-wide programs. One early example was the Gospel Truth, a collaborative program with the National Park Service East held in 1970 and 1972. One concert of this gospel and jazz series attracted approximately eight thousand people to the grounds of the Frederick Douglass Home.[11] Later, staff planned a Family Day and an annual Juneteenth celebration commemorating the day—June 19, 1865—when Texas slaves first learned they were free. The museum also fostered programs linking people with similar interests, such as the collection- and preservation-minded Friends for the Preservation of African American Culture.

Left: **Youth Advisory Council co-founder (Gregory) Christopher Reynolds** *(far left).* **In 1973, Reynolds became a member of the internationally renowned Paul Taylor Dance Company. Reynolds later formed his own dance troupe, which debuted in Russia.** *By permission of PLAYBILL®. PLAYBILL® is a registered Trademark of PLAYBILL Incorporated, New York, NY.*

Children from nearby Barry Farms housing complex performing one of their own plays, ca. early 1968. The children were organized by (Gregory) Christopher Reynolds and Toni Thompson of the Youth Advisory Council.

Youth Adviso adviser, Zor

The Youth Advisory Council

From the beginning, Kinard insisted on the active involvement of community youth. (Gregory) Christopher Reynolds, then a teenager growing up in the Barry Farms public housing development, describes his confronting Kinard after the museum's opening ceremonies in 1967. He had heard no one say anything about young people, he told Kinard. What was there for them? Kinard immediately invited him to "come and talk about it, and come up with some ideas." Accompanied by schoolmate Toni Thompson, Reynolds visited Kinard at the museum. The two later organized Barry Farms children to present several programs in the museum.[12] Still later, as other neighborhood teenagers gravitated to the museum, the Youth Advisory Council (YAC) was born. Although Zora B. Martin served as their chief adviser, the entire museum staff functioned as a nurturing surrogate family to them.

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Youth Advisory Council members clowning around with their adviser, Zora Martin-Felton, March 17, 1972

With an aplomb unusual for their years, the teenagers elbowed their way into the inner operating structure of the museum. They remained there until most of them went off to college or married. They designed and helped produce their own exhibitions; traveled to Puerto Rico and Nassau with money they raised and with contributions from the neighborhood; designed and sold "black angel" Christmas cards across the country; taught classes and held seasonal parties for children in the museum; helped families that had been evicted; and were part of an intensive black heritage program created jointly by themselves and museum staff.

John Kinard and the "YACers" enjoyed an especially close relationship. He was proud of all of their efforts, but was perhaps most elated that four YAC members followed in his footsteps in journeying to Botswana, Ghana, Zambia, and Haiti under the auspices of Operation Crossroads Africa.

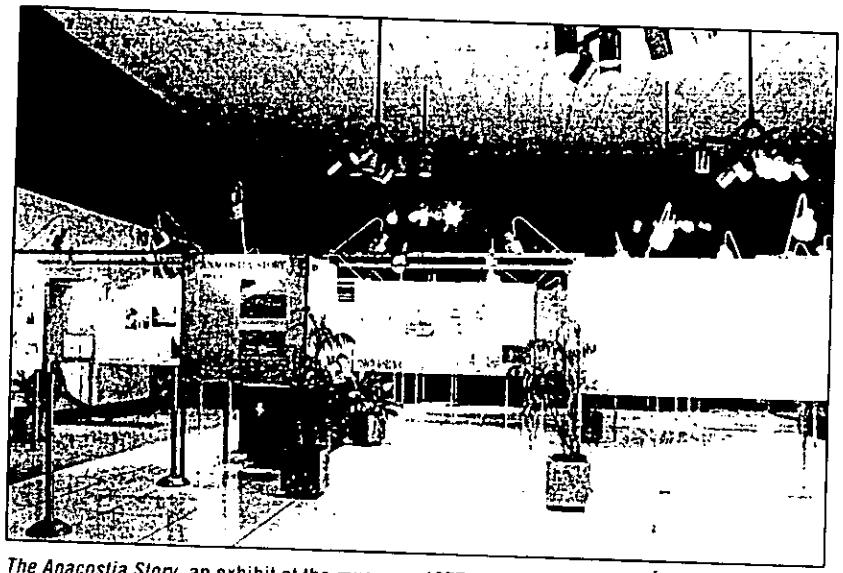
Exhibits

John Kinard used exhibits in an innovative way. He wanted to help museum visitors to understand more fully the nature of their problems and to find and try solutions. Some early exhibits were pioneering. *The Rat: Man's Invited Affliction* (1969), examining the ecology of the Norway rat, made it clear that the new museum would focus on the concerns of its inner-city neighbors. *Lorton Reformatory: Beyond Time* (1970) addressed the concerns of incarcerated men; it was developed and installed in collaboration with Lorton residents. *The Evolution of a Community: Part II* (1972) examined five major urban problems identified by local residents. In 1974, in an effort, said Kinard, "to help people understand what's happening to their minds when they watch that boob-tube," the museum presented *The Message Makers*.

The late Max Robinson, local television news anchor, reporting on the Anacostia Neighborhood Museum's pioneering exhibit on urban problems, *The Rat: Man's Invited Affliction*, 1969. Live rats inhabited a specially constructed simulated backyard.
Photograph by Zora Martin-Felton

Kinard often referred to the museum's early panel displays as "pasteboard exhibits." Carolyn Margolis, a volunteer who became a paid member of the research staff, vividly remembers typing labels on an IBM Selectric typewriter, using the Orator (an "all-caps" font) element, and then attaching the labels to panels with double-sided tape. But Margolis also recalls the camaraderie and the family spirit that prevailed in those early days:

> *There was never an exhibit we opened when we didn't work until an hour before [the show opened] on Sunday.... John would come in at 2 A.M. to clean the bathrooms, then go out and buy Kentucky Fried Chicken, and come back with buckets of chicken and sodas....That's when we were at our best....The level of spirit was so good, and the kids [the museum's Youth Advisory Council] and the neighborhood were always there.*



The Anacostia Story, an exhibit at the museum, 1977. Based on extensive use of primary sources and detailed local oral history interviews, the exhibit traced the historical and socioeconomic development of the local community from 1608 to 1930 and documented the area's significant relationship to the rest of the Washington metropolitan region.

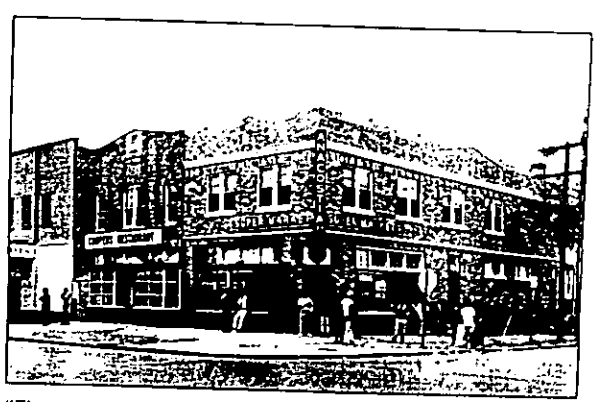
Hazelene Evans, who served as secretary to the Research Department for thirteen years, echoed those memories:

> *In those days we did everything.... It didn't make a difference if you were a secretary.... We painted, silk-screened.... It was a bunch of caring people in those days.... It was nothing for us to stay up all night putting up a show.... We didn't care about the hours [and] never got a lot of compensation in terms of money.* [14]

"The Corner"

There was little doubt in the minds of many closely associated with the museum that the decision to locate this experimental facility in Anacostia was directly related to the social, political, and racial climate of the 1960s in the country generally and in Anacostia in particular. [15] Ripley originally had envisioned the museum in an inner-city urban neighborhood, perhaps one that included a laundromat—"that symbol of daytime neighborhood involvement." [16] The actual site was on a busy, commercial strip near two schools, a number of day care centers, two liquor stores, two churches, a restaurant, a power substation, two barber shops, "mom and pop" stores, a Safeway supermarket, two funeral parlors, and other thriving businesses.

Although the Nichols Avenue site offered sufficient space—at least initially—and public transportation on most of the bus lines coming into Anacostia, one aspect of the location brought loud complaints to Kinard from the outset: "the corner." The intersection of Nichols Avenue and Talbert Street had been for as long as anyone could remember a "hanging out" place for many of the neighborhood's male residents. "The corner" was almost always crowded: men who worked at night "hung out" during the day, while those who worked during the day stopped by on their way home. It was the outdoor neighborhood community center, a place where one could hold long discussions and get the latest news on



"The corner"—the intersection of Martin Luther King, Jr., Avenue and Talbert Street, two doors from the Anacostia Neighborhood Museum, ca. 1970

Alvin Prue, a
museum's ar
"the corner,"

happenings in Southeast and in the city at large. Among the working males were a small number who chose wine as a fairly constant and cherished companion. At least one proprietor suspected that some of the corner regulars were among those who had burglarized his premises. Other businessmen in the area were greatly concerned about the general effect of crime on their businesses. [17] However, none of the older or younger men on "the corner" ever menaced museum visitors. They simply looked intimidating.

James A. Piper remembers coming to the Carver Theater when it was still boarded up:

> *All these guys were hanging out front and we had to walk through them, and they helped us pull the boards off the building...and helped us pull the [theater] seats up....[During advisory committee meetings]...the people off the streets—the drunks—would walk in...and they would say what they had to say.... And if they talked too much, we'd ask them to leave. They would leave, and we'd thank them and be nice to them. That's the way it was.*

Alvin Prue, an Anacostia native, and Georgia Jessup, the museum's artist-in-residence, viewing her mural interpretation of "the corner," early 1970s

Joy Ford Austin, then director of the African American Museums Association and a frequent museum visitor, remembers that "John Kinard used to brag about the fact that in those days there used to be winos who would circle the museum and never touch it....I know...they'd come in and check it out." As far as most of the staff and others familiar with "the corner" were concerned, the men were the museum's protectors. [18]

Four years after the museum opened, Kinard received a letter from Dr. Charles E. Qualls, a staunch museum supporter who was also president of the Anacostia Business and Professional Association and the community's respected longtime pharmacist. Qualls was pointed in his comments: "Some members of this association are concerned about the area there at Talbert and Martin Luther King, Jr. Ave. from Gallaway Liquor store, the corner store, and Coopers [sic] Restaurant." Kinard's response was quick and typical: "Please contact me at any time to set this meeting up. We will meet with some of the people involved on the corner if you wish. We can meet here at the museum or at a place of your choosing." [19] But not all of the discussions in the world could shake the men loose from "their" corner—this in spite of the fact that they had free access to the museum's Arts and Craft Center and Photography Lab, a small row house on the corner of Talbert Street and Shannon Place, where they could pitch horseshoes or play checkers in the yard or engage in crafts and photography programs inside.

Neighborhood "regulars" at the Anacostia Neighborhood Museum Arts and Craft Center and Photography Lab, Talbert Street and Shannon Place, S.E., early 1970s. Shown pitching horseshoes is the late Edgar ("Tiny") Tyler, one of the museum staff members.

In time, the character of the corner began to change. By the late 1960s drugs had begun to invade the community, and later the familiar faces of the Anacostia regulars were replaced by a younger, violence-prone group of users and dealers. The "old" regulars were dislodged and sought refuge on Talbert Street. At

however, was a staff member or visitor ever harmed. The "new" regulars were too engaged in carrying out their transactions to be concerned with museum-goers or passersby.

As "the corner" began to develop a reputation as one of the largest outdoor drug marts in the city, some people began to avoid the museum. For a brief time, however, there was one evening a week when "the corner" was "clean." That was when the Nation of Islam held its regular meetings in the museum. At those times, suited and bow-tied black men circled "the corner" and posted sentries. Only those with legitimate business entered the circle to go to the store, the museum, or to pass on their way.

One day, out of sheer frustration, John Kinard ordered all staff to vacate the building. They were simply to sit in front of the museum. They would "take back their space." For most of the day, "the corner" stayed relatively quiet. There were no drug transactions that anyone could see. When it was time to leave for the day, staff took their chairs inside—and the "new" regulars slowly drifted back to reclaim their turf.

In 1981 John Kinard sent a memorandum to the Smithsonian's Planning Committee for the Anacostia Museum Building:

> *The Anacostia Museum's public space, Education Department and Directors [sic] office are currently housed in rather decrep[it] leased spaces on one of the most crime riddled intersections in the city. Drugs are a way of life....Drugs and violence in the immediate vicinity make entrance to, and egress from, the museum physically dangerous. Dangerous to visitors and staff alike. Certainly not a pleasant addendum to the visitors [sic] overall "Smithsonian Experience."* [20]

About 1982, Kinard and the administrative workers left the cramped, antiquated King Avenue building and joined the museum's exhibits design and production staff and Research Department at the museum's exhibit production facility at 1901 Fort Place, a mile up the hill. In February 1987, the education staff followed, closing down the old Carver Theater building.

John Kinard never won the battle for "the corner," for it was more than a contest over a particular innercity intersection. As the museum prepared for what would be its final move, Pat Press, writing in the *Washington Post*, offered this insight:

> *In many cities, the railroad drives a wedge between people whose income, education and occupation—on paper—are different. In Washington, it is the river that divides—not the Potomac, but the Anacostia....To cross over its five bridges...is to "cross over troubled waters."...To live east of the river is to be exiled from the business, government and commercial centers of Washington....Most people do not arrive by choice.*

Marjorie Kinard maintains that her husband was "a fighter." Some battles he could not win. Some he did win, but at what personal cost it is difficult to determine. Joy Ford Austin observes: "I am convinced that he took on his person some battles that none of us will ever understand....If you will research...I'll bet you'll understand in that interplay (between Kinard and the Smithsonian)...a man who had to take on tremendous suffering and tremendous affront to his personhood and dignity to make that museum work." Austin's feelings are shared by Joan Maynard, director of the Society for the Preservation of Weeksville and Bedford-Stuyvesant History in Brooklyn, New York. She states: "I dare say maybe even people very close to him didn't understand some of the things he had to go through to open some doors through which many of us have passed and will pass through. Some of these things may never be known." [21]

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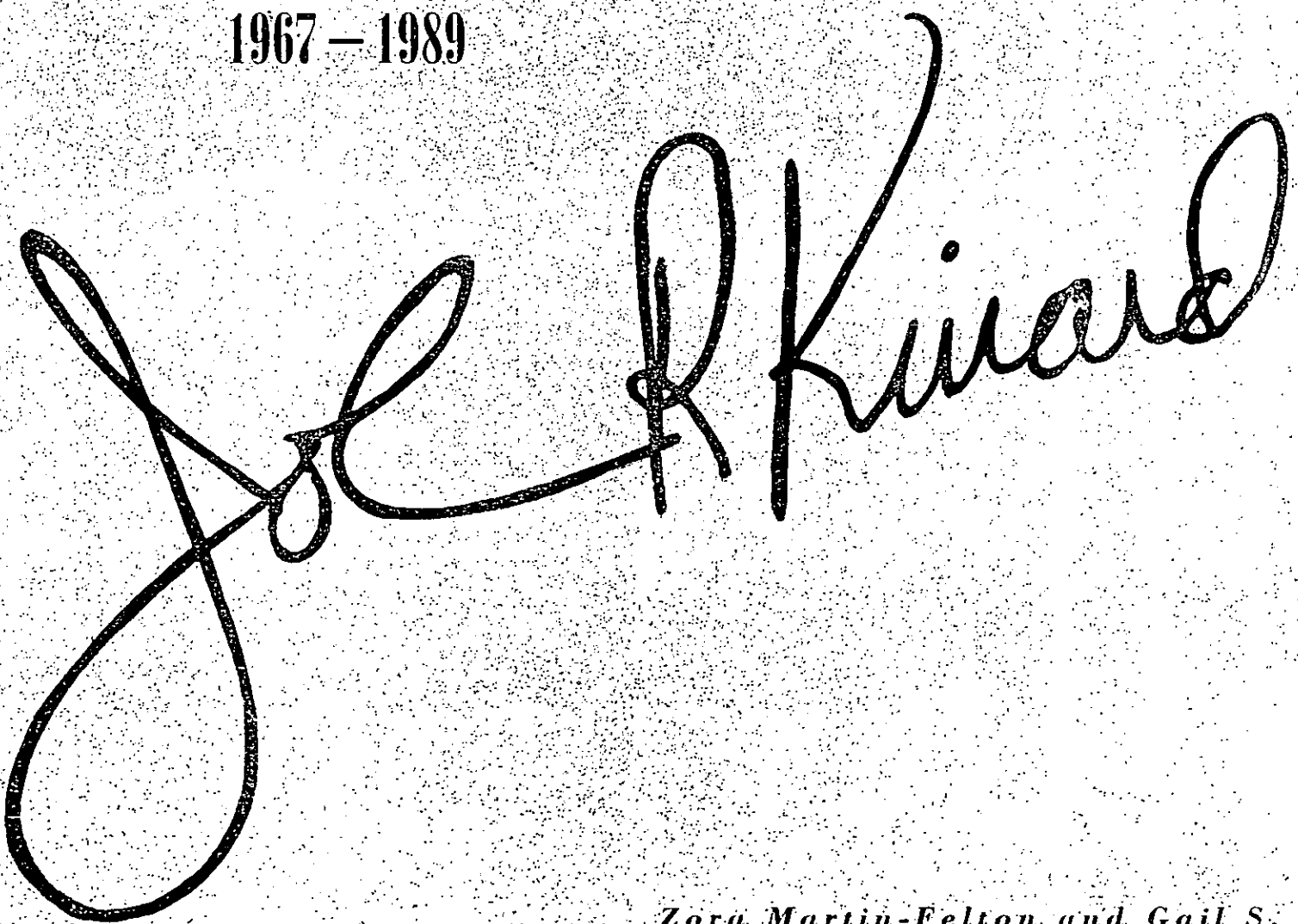
A DIFFERENT DRUMMER

JOHN KINARD AND THE ANACOSTIA MUSEUM
1967 – 1989



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PROLOGUE

THE LEGACY OF JOHN KINARD

When, in 1987, Kenneth Hudson's *Museums of Influence* named the Anacostia Museum as one of the world's most influential museums during the last two hundred years, few of those who knew the museum or had heard of John Kinard were surprised. But some were surprised that the Anacostia Museum would be on a list that did *not* include the Louvre in Paris, the J. Paul Getty Museum in California, the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., or any other Smithsonian museum.

Hudson's criteria were very clear. His museums of influence

> *are museums which have broken ground in such an original or striking way that other museums have felt disposed or compelled to follow their example.... This means that each museum, by its existence, its approach and its style, has met a real social need. It will have both echoed a national or international change of mood and encouraged its development. This implies, of course, that the influence of these pioneering institutions has been felt by the general public, by their visitors, and not only by other museums.*

The Anacostia Museum was included, Hudson said, because "Anacostia ... must be given the credit of pioneering the concept of a museum without walls to keep it within bounds, a museum with a creative flow of ideas, exhibits and people between itself and the outside world."[1]

Hudson's recognition came twenty years after the museum first opened its doors as an "experimental neighborhood museum" housed in a converted theater in a predominantly black and poor section of Southeast Washington, D.C. This influential museum that changed the idea of what a museum can be was led by a community activist who became the Smithsonian Institution's first African American museum director—John Kinard.