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The Washington Post

washingtonpost.com

The Washington Post

November 26, 2000, Sunday, Final Edition
Correction Appended

END OF THE ROADS; In the Interstate Era, Congress ruled Washington like a fiefdom. Then a fight over some freeways inspired a biracial, neighborhood-level movement to fight the federal power

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SECTION: MAGAZINE; Pg. W10

LENGTH: 6704 words

If you drive south from Baltimore along Interstate 95, you have to make a choice when you reach the Capital Beltway: west toward Silver Spring or east toward College Park? If you try to continue south, toward the District, you'll find that the roadway stops dead about 200 yards later, in a field of flowers.

If you enter the District via the Theodore Roosevelt Bridge, you'll encounter a similar superhighway stub: Soon after crossing the Potomac, Interstate 66 dumps you onto local streets.

If you try to drive to a game at RFK Stadium via the Southeast-Southwest Freeway, you can't quite get there, because the freeway ends in a mound of dust about a mile short of your destination.

And if you drive north along Interstate 395 past the Capitol, keep a foot near the brake. About a mile after the tunnel passes the famous dome, the road dead-ends at New York Avenue, at the front door of the Church of God and Saints of Christ.

There was a time when the Washington area was supposed to have 450 miles of interstate highways. About 38 of those miles were supposed to pass through the District of Columbia. But because of an epic political battle that lasted 22 years, only 10 were ever built -- and all were finished before the protests

END OF THE ROADS; In the Interstate Era, Congress ruled Washington like a fiefdom. Then a fight over some freeways inspired a biracial, neighborhood-level movement to fight the federal power The Washington Post November 26, 2000, Sunday, Final Edition Correction Appended started in earnest.

Instead, the Washington area got Metro -- all \$ 5 billion and 103 miles of it. Much of the money had been earmarked for interstate highways. It was diverted to subways. But this was no simple swap on a spreadsheet. The struggle to block freeway-building wrenched local politics between 1954 and 1976 like no other issue, involving public protests, court decisions, presidential-level politics and cooperation between the races that would have been extraordinary in any other era.

Should a single congressman have ordered the city to build certain roads and bridges, even though most local residents did not want them? He did.

Should a fledgling city government have knuckled under to that congressman so it could get money for Metro? It did.

Could an unlikely coalition of blacks and whites block freeways that they didn't want, in a town without any representation in Congress or heavyweight political experience? It happened.

Today, Washington has fewer miles of freeways within its borders than any other major city on the East Coast. More than 200,000 housing units were saved from destruction. So were more than 100 square miles of parkland around the metropolitan area. The city was spared from freeways bored under the Mall, freeways punched through stable middle-class black neighborhoods, freeways tunneled under K Street, freeways that would have obliterated the Georgetown waterfront and the Maryland bank of the Potomac.

"They were just going to pave the District of Columbia over," recalls the Rev. Walter E. Fauntroy, for four years vice chairman of the D.C Council, for 20 years the city's nonvoting delegate to Congress, for 40 years pastor of New Bethel Baptist Church in Shaw. "We couldn't allow it. We just couldn't."

It all began with a man from St. Louis named Harland Bartholomew.

A well-respected urban planner, he was hired in 1954 by the Eisenhower administration to be chairman of the National Capital Park and Planning Commission. To bolster national defense and make long-distance travel easier, Eisenhower had proposed the largest public works project in history -- the interstate highway system. One of Bartholomew's main jobs was to design the District of Columbia's portion.

Plans to modernize and expand Washington's highways had been kicking around, in pieces, since the 1920s. Congress approved the George Washington Memorial Parkway along the Virginia shore of the Potomac in the 1930s. In the 1940s, it authorized the Whitehurst Freeway along the Georgetown waterfront. A master plan issued in 1950 urged a wide variety of new highways so traffic could flow more freely, dense development could be avoided and downtown would be more accessible.

For years, in professional circles, Bartholomew had sung the praises of circumferential highways. He thought they were especially useful for clustering new development in efficient ways. In his updated version of the 1950 master plan, issued in 1956, Bartholomew proposed three circumferentials for the Washington area.

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One would run in a flattened oval around the central core of the city, about half a mile north and south of the White House.

The second would have a radius of about four miles from the White House, running across the top of the city along the Missouri and Nebraska Avenue corridors. On the city's east side, it would run through Trinidad and Capitol Hill to the Anacostia River; on the west side, it would slice through Glover-Archbold Park to Georgetown.

The third would run an average of 10 miles out from the White House, in the suburbs. It's the one ring road that actually got built -- the Capital Beltway.

Of course, Bartholomew's loops had to be connected to one another, and to whatever superhighways Maryland and Virginia were planning. After he arrived, the two states signed an agreement giving Bartholomew the power to coordinate highway plans on a regional basis.

In 1956, with the passage of the Federal Highway Act, Congress promised to supply 90 cents of every dollar that the interstate highways would cost. Peter Stebbins Craig, a Northwest Washington lawyer who battled D.C. freeways for nearly 15 years, called the 90-10 formula "the 'ten cents dollar.' It was irresistible to the local highway planners."

It was also irresistible to the downtown Washington business community.

In the 1950s, Washington was undergoing dramatic change. Nearly one-third of the city's white residents -- mostly middle-class -- left for the suburbs. In the same decade, the black population -- mostly working-class -- swelled by nearly 40 percent because of growing federal hiring. More than 300,000 members of the two races came and went. In 1957, Washington became the first major city in America to have a black majority.

The downtown business elite was slow to understand that the serious money had moved to the suburbs and wasn't coming back. Major department store owners assumed that because the middle class had always shopped along F Street, it always would. If whites had moved to the suburbs, the thinking went, all they'd need would be modern roads by which to return to their favorite stores more conveniently.

When Bartholomew's full proposal was made public, it was warmly endorsed by the Board of Trade, the D.C. Highway Department, The Washington Post, the Evening Star and leading lights on Capitol Hill. Besides the three circumferential roads, it featured a Three Sisters Bridge over the Potomac to carry Interstate 66 into Georgetown and no fewer than seven multi-lane highways -- including one that would require the destruction of 4,000 homes and another one that would tunnel under the Mall (see list, page 15).

Not one of these thoroughfares exists today.

To a large degree, protesters were victorious because they planned carefully, says Reginald H. Booker, 59, who chaired the anti-freeway coalition, the Emergency Committee on the Transportation Crisis. "And race was a major part of it," he says.

Booker was always quick to use the slogan for which ECTC became known: "White Men's Roads Through Black Men's Homes." However, he is just as quick to point

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out that the anti-freeway forces would probably have been defeated if whites had not rallied to the cause.

"The whole theory was to appeal to homeowners, no matter what race they were," Booker says. "Our movement was unique. It was blacks and whites in a common effort, an integrated group, working in their own interests. That was the significant thing. It was an issue that united people."

One night in the late 1960s, Booker went to visit a friend who lived in an apartment complex along Eastern Avenue in Prince George's County. The friend asked Booker to go with him to a tenants' meeting, where residents were planning a protest over living conditions. Booker spoke at the meeting about the need to organize and stay organized, to be vocal and stay vocal.

Afterward, a short, slight man approached Booker. He had a tuft of white hair and looked a bit like Mr. Magoo. The man said, "I liked the way you handled yourself," Booker recalls. "He invited me to his house to meet his family."

The two men made an unusual pair. Booker was an African American who had come to Washington from Philadelphia in 1950, when he was 9. His mother and stepfather rented a place at 360 N St. SW. Within two years, it had been bulldozed in the name of urban renewal. "Ever since, I think I've been involved in every issue in the black community on the front lines," he says.

His family ended up in a small row house on Luray Place NW, near Howard University (his mother still lives there). One day in 1954, Booker heard that local civil rights leaders were planning to picket a Woolworth's at 14th Street and Park Road NW for refusing to serve blacks at its lunch counter. "I took a walk up there and joined the line," he says.

He was 13 years old, a seventh-grader at Shaw Junior High School.

The Magoo stand-in was Sammie Abbott, a firebrand of the old school. "I'm a perpetually mad person," he would tell a Post reporter in 1978. "I hate injustice. As far as I'm concerned, I'm living to fight injustice. I'm living to fight the goddamned thing. I'm too mad to sleep."

The grandson of Arab Christian immigrants who fled persecution in Syria, Abbott and his family (who were named Abud then) settled in Ithaca, N.Y. His father ran a grocery, but it failed after a local bank yanked his father's financing. The bank felt threatened by the politics of his son Sammie, who was radicalized by the Great Depression.

Abbott attended Cornell University but dropped out in the early 1930s to devote himself to union organizing. He came to the Washington area in 1940 to continue his organizing work. He and his family settled in Takoma Park, just across the District border, so he could vote. He worked as a hod carrier on construction jobs, a steelworker and a freelance commercial artist earning \$ 10 per watercolor. He continued his organizing work in all those fields.

Shortly after World War II, Abbott became extremely active in the peace movement. He was D.C. and Maryland coordinator for a petition drive that urged the United States never to use nuclear weapons again. At the height of the McCarthy era, Abbott was fired from his job as an illustrator for an advertising agency after being called to testify before the House Un-American Activities

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Committee. He was repeatedly questioned by the FBI and the local police about his politics, which he considered Marxist, but not communist.

"They always asked me if Sam was a communist," says Booker. "I wasn't interested in his political philosophy. I was interested in stopping the freeway."

Early in the decade, freeways proposed for various white sections of town had either been pressured out of master plans or deflected to black sections. But that enraged protesters of both races, and led to demonstrations. In 1965, Abbott -- whose house at 7308 Birch Ave. in Takoma Park lay in the path of one proposed route for the Northeast Freeway -- and a nucleus of about eight others founded the Emergency Committee on the Transportation Crisis. At first, ECTC's membership consisted chiefly of its leadership.

At the same time, Metro was taking shape. Rapid rail transit for Washington had been proposed as early as the 1930s. By 1965, President Johnson had authorized a regional transit agency, and by 1967, actual planning had begun. So a federally funded alternative to freeways was on the drawing boards, not just alive in various imaginations. Two administrations -- Johnson's and then Nixon's -- would labor behind the scenes to assure Metro's future while building some freeways to mollify powerful pro-freeway members of Congress.

By the late '60s, the anti-freeway battle was reaching a critical stage. In 1968, the powerlessness of the city to decide its own future was suddenly and starkly demonstrated when the chairman of the House Appropriations subcommittee on the District refused to release funds for Washington's share of Metro unless all of Bartholomew's roads and bridges were built.

Abbott (and soon Booker, too) believed that public protests could block freeways and divert the earmarked millions to build subways instead. Now, they didn't have to worry about attracting manpower to their cause. Neighborhood groups in Brookland and Takoma Park -- areas directly threatened by the North Central and Northeast freeways -- sprang forward to join ECTC. By late 1968, ECTC meetings routinely began to attract 200 or more.

Early joiners had been mostly whites, but significant numbers of blacks began taking an active role. According to Booker, many were homeowners whose houses were threatened with destruction. They were ordinary Washingtonians -- federal employees, bus drivers, store clerks. Almost none had ever been involved in a big-league protest before. Some were fearful of being fired, or of having their careers derailed.

For more than a decade, Abbott served as ECTC's publicity chairman. Although Booker became the group's chairman, Abbott was the spark plug, the strategist, the one who supplied and spilled passion on demand.

Through the early 1970s, Abbott and Booker met regularly at Abbott's home. Ruth Abbott would serve dinner, but planning sessions would last far longer than the meat and potatoes. So Abbott and Booker would walk to a nearby Gifford's ice cream store. They would buy a quart of vanilla or butter pecan and cart it back to Abbott's house, where discussions would continue.

"Sam had tremendous political insight and instinct," Booker recalls. "He could build a superior organization, and he understood human nature." Abbott also understood the racial dynamics of the time. "He didn't want people to feel

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that he was a white man manipulating a black man," Booker says. "He would always defer to me. There was one public spokesman, and that was me."

Abbott always saw the struggle against freeways as being based in race. In 1967, at a public hearing at the District Building, he spent hours railing about the damage that the East Leg of the Inner Loop would do to black Washington.

"These are commuter roads," he roared. "Men come in an average of 1.6 to a car. They drive back to their bedrooms [in the suburbs] at night. They don't care what happens to the District."

Abbott was quick to note that the white establishment supported every inch of the highway plan. Among those who testified in favor at the 1967 hearing were the American Automobile Association, the Greater Washington Central Labor Council, the National Capital Transportation Agency, the Federal City Council, the Washington Trucking Association and the local chapter of the Automotive Trade Association. Meanwhile, the cement, steel, rubber and concrete lobbies were solidly lined up behind the proposal on Capitol Hill.

Abbott dubbed all of the organizations "stooges." He noted that none of their witnesses had black skin. Although his 20 followers carried fairly tame picket signs that day ("Down With the Highway Lobby" and "No Parklands for Freeways"), Abbott wasn't going to settle for photo ops.

He announced a direct assault on the city's gasoline tax -- a one-week boycott of gasoline, starting the following month. The boycott never amounted to much, but the strategy highlighted a small but telling reality: Seven cents of every dollar spent on gas in the city was funneled into a pot called the Highway Trust Fund. By congressional decree, that money could be spent only on highways.

"They take seven cents out of every gallon and use it to bury us in concrete," Abbott told the 1967 hearing. As a Washington Post story reported the next day, rather mildly, "What the city ought to build instead is a rapid transit system, he [Abbott] added."

Appearing before panels in suit and tie was only one part of the Abbott-Booker strategy. From 1968 to 1972, ECTC conducted more than 75 street protests. It was able to draw on the ranks of anti-Vietnam demonstrators (many of them local college students) for manpower. As a result, almost no ECTC demonstration was smaller than 50 persons, and all were carefully biracial. That assured television and newspaper coverage, and suggested a relentless determination that Booker believes may have worn opponents down.

In all, Abbott was arrested 34 times in the course of Washington's anti-freeway demonstrations. But he never mellowed.

Elected mayor of Takoma Park twice in the 1980s, he railed in politically incorrect fashion against the gentrification that had come to the town. He described his newer constituents as "those people whose wives use their maiden names." As for hippies left over from the 1960s, who were numerous in Takoma Park then, and still are, Abbott described their politics as "a crock." Because of his cantankerousness, a proposal to name Takoma Park's city hall in his honor after his death very nearly went down to defeat.

When Abbott died, in 1990, at the age of 82, he had never received any formal recognition for his role in blocking freeways. But his former colleagues on ECTC

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know that he was essential. "When people fly into Washington, they marvel at how pretty it is," says Angela Rooney, who helped found ECTC. "Well, it wouldn't look that way if not for Sammie Abbott."

In taking on the freeways, the activists of ECTC were taking on the power of Congress -- as personified by a single subcommittee chairman.

Rep. William Houston Natcher may have been the most diligent member in the history of the House. He didn't miss a roll call vote for 40 years -- until three weeks before his death. He cast his 18,401st consecutive vote on March 2, 1994, hooked up to an IV line and an oxygen mask and lying on a hospital gurney that had been wheeled onto the House floor for the occasion.

Natcher never spent more than \$ 7,000 on any of his 20 congressional campaigns, and what he spent was always his own. His office staff consisted of "the five ladies" (his phrase), who answered the telephones, greeted visitors and took dictation. Natcher opened his own mail. He never owned a fax machine.

Natcher accumulated power the old-fashioned way -- by rising, doggedly and quietly, through the seniority ranks to become chairman of the Appropriations Committee, where all discretionary spending bills in the House are decided. Natcher did not attain the chairmanship until 1992, two years before he died.

From 1961 to 1979, Natcher chaired an Appropriations subcommittee that was a notorious backwater. No one ever wanted the job, and no one ever accepted it unless the party leadership asked him to, on bended knee. It was the D.C. appropriations subcommittee, the panel that approved all spending for the District of Columbia.

There was no glory in the post, no chance to attract allies or headlines, no chance to change the course of the nation. The subcommittee chairmanship has almost always gone to a loyal, uncomplicated, go-along-get-along sort. Bill Natcher combined those qualities with a steely determination: When it came to the District of Columbia, the will of Congress would be done.

The city was given limited home rule in 1967 (an appointed mayor and city council). It got slightly more in 1974 (an elected mayor and council). But throughout his 18 years as head of the D.C. subcommittee, Bill Natcher was the rule that counted. As far as freeways were concerned, Natcher saw the question in simple terms: Congress had authorized 38 miles of them in 1968, Congress ran the District of Columbia, and that was that.

Congress had also authorized money for Washington's share of Metro, then in the planning stages. But Natcher was increasingly frustrated over continuing protests and lawsuits (four suits were filed by citizens whose homes were threatened with destruction). In 1968, he declared that no subway money would be released until all the freeways and the Three Sisters Bridge were built.

It was a stance that Natcher maintained over the next eight years. He never explained it, because he never explained anything. Natcher routinely ducked reporters, and never gave an on-the-record interview about either freeways or subways at any time during his career. Nor did he respond publicly when a young Washington activist named Marion Barry Jr. denounced him as a "racist congressman" who was trying "to blackmail the city."

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In cloakroom conversations, however, Walter Fauntroy got a few hints about Natcher's attitude toward subways.

"He used to say to me, 'Take it underground and you'll have a crime city,' " recalls Fauntroy, who served in the House with Natcher for 20 years. Natcher also feared that the subway would be a huge money-loser. "His point was that the subway would be a big white elephant," Fauntroy says.

Natcher turned out to be right about one thing: He was always skeptical of estimates that a 97-mile Metro system (the original proposal) could be built for \$ 2.5 billion. The 103-mile system ended up costing twice as much.

So was Natcher a country bumpkin from Bowling Green, Ky., who just didn't get it about a modern American city? Did he want to thwart the city's wishes because of its black majority?

"At one time, I thought it was a racist orientation," says Fauntroy. "At another time, I thought he was in the pay of the highway lobby. Even now, I don't know. I just don't know . . .

"I don't believe it was that simple. Sometimes, in the subcommittee, he would do things for us and he'd wink and say, 'See? I'm reasonable.' "

Fauntroy is the first to grant that Natcher was probably not doing the bidding of the highway lobby directly. Natcher never accepted a penny in campaign contributions, so he was never in a position to have to repay a favor. "It is a mystery," Fauntroy says.

Although Natcher was bombarded with criticism by ECTC and editorial writers, he was unfailingly courteous to his opponents. When city leaders testified before his subcommittee, and argued that controlling one's own freeways was a basic local right, Natcher would sit there silently, with a smile frozen on his face, according to the journalism of the time. He never responded to personal attacks by witnesses -- and there were many, from Sammie Abbott and others. Nor is there any evidence that he ever complained about his treatment to fellow members of the House.

"He's as determined as I've ever seen a man be," said a Capitol Hill staff member, who was quoted in a 1968 article in the Evening Star. "As determined, and as wrong."

The Three Sisters Bridge and its connected freeways were doomed by public protests. But they were actually defeated in a court of law.

"I bought this house in 1957," says Peter Stebbins Craig. He's sitting in the second-floor study of his center-hall colonial on Macomb Street in Cleveland Park. He's wearing a T-shirt that reads: "Washington: A City With Sense."

In his early years of living in the house, "I was preoccupied with taking off 10 layers of wallpaper. I was not at all involved in local affairs," Craig says.

One day, late in the summer of 1959, someone knocked on his door. She was carrying a petition urging residents of Macomb Street to oppose a cross-park freeway.

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"I said to her, 'What in hell is the cross-park freeway?'," Craig recalls. The woman explained that highway planners intended to drive a superhighway from the Georgetown waterfront up the spine of Glover-Archbold Park and out Wisconsin Avenue into Bethesda, where it would join what is now Interstate 270.

"It sounded pretty awful, so I signed the petition," says Craig.

The more he learned of the freeway plans, the more determined to oppose them he became. Craig and two other lawyers became the legal wheels behind the Northwest Committee for Transportation Planning, eventually a key support group for ECTC.

In 1960, by playing Capitol Hill connections he had cultivated as an associate at the law firm of Covington & Burling, Craig won a five-year ban on freeways west of Rock Creek and north of M Street. But he soon realized that the ban only shoved the specter of freeways onto poorer, blacker neighborhoods. In fact, on official city plans, the cross-park freeway soon was replotted as the North Central Freeway, linking Silver Spring and Capitol Hill -- the road that would have led to the razing of 4,000 homes, most of them occupied by black families.

"I couldn't be parochial. I had to oppose the whole thing," he says. Especially after Sammie Abbott called him out of the blue one night and said: "All you care about is the rich white folks west of the park."

"He said to me that I was being pretty provincial," Craig says. "He guilt-tripped me, and being a good Quaker, I fell for it."

A group called the Committee of 100 on the Federal City was formed. It consisted of the city's civic and good-works elite -- the lawyers, politicians' wives, ministers, church ladies and others who formed a distinct counterpoint to the business lobby. It was unanimous in its opposition to freeways and the Three Sisters Bridge. Craig, a member of the committee, drafted its first court challenge.

Craig's primary argument was that freeway planners had ignored a law from the 1880s. It had been passed when Washington outgrew its original borders and spread north beyond Florida Avenue, into what was then Washington County. The law stated that no highway right-of-way in the city could be wider than Pennsylvania Avenue. Every freeway planned within the city would have been.

The challenge was thrown out of U.S. District Court, but the U.S. Court of Appeals handed Craig a 2-1 victory in February 1968.

Of course, the issue was far from settled. Three months after Craig's victory, Congress (through Natcher) directed that work on the Three Sisters Bridge begin within 30 days. It was a measure of Natcher's determination that he issued the directive even though courts and local leaders had already ruled or recommended otherwise.

So Craig and his fellow lawyers sued again, alleging that the other side "hadn't adequately researched alternatives," Craig says.

Mayor Walter E. Washington and the D.C. Council had been in office only a few months. They had not been elected, and had no direct power. Still, they redoubled their opposition to the freeway plan and trolled for support within

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the Johnson administration. Secretary of Transportation Alan Boyd leaked word that he opposed Three Sisters. Would a Democratic Congress press ahead with freeways and Three Sisters in the face of such opposition, especially from its own party mates?

It would. Natcher repeated that there would be no subway money unless the freeways and the bridge were built. Without the District's share of the subway money, the entire Metro system was threatened, because suburban governments were threatening to bolt.

The least powerful body flinched first. On August 9, 1969, the D.C. Council voted to comply with the Federal Highway Act of 1968. It approved the Three Sisters Bridge, the North Central Freeway and several other superhighways. In return, the city would get its subway money. All of this had the quiet blessing of the Nixon administration.

The council meeting that night was described as a "riot" by the Evening Star, a "melee" by The Washington Post. Fistfights broke out. Chairs were thrown. An ashtray whizzed past the ear of Council Chairman Gilbert Hahn Jr. Fourteen people were arrested.

Then, a month later, President Nixon's transportation secretary, John Volpe, publicly reversed Alan Boyd's position. Volpe ordered work on the Three Sisters Bridge to begin in one week.

As construction began, near Foxhall and Canal roads NW, just west of Georgetown, demonstrators lay down in front of bulldozers and tied themselves to trees that were slated to be chopped down. Opponents paddled a canoe out to the Three Sisters -- the three boulders siting in mid-river -- and hung a banner on the rocks that read: "Stop the Bridge." Arrests took place daily. But work was halted by a temporary restraining order issued that October.

In August 1970, slightly less than a year after new lawsuits had been filed, Craig and his fellow volunteer lawyers scored another victory: John Sirica, chief judge of the U.S. District Court, who was soon to be world-famous for his role in Watergate, ordered work on the bridge halted. His opinion said that proper planning procedures had not been followed and local voices had not been adequately heard.

The city, which saw its Metro money heading for the drain, immediately took the case to the U.S. Court of Appeals. Meanwhile, city officials began laying out \$ 500 a day to protect the construction site from possible vandalism.

Sirica's decision was upheld by the appeals court in August 1972. The Supreme Court refused to review it. Meanwhile, no freeways had been started, much less completed, because the city government and the National Capital Planning Commission had quietly dropped them from transportation master plans, even though they knew this would irritate Rep. Natcher. Their hope was that a court victory would make freeway plans (and the spending of political capital) unnecessary. They also hoped that the winds had shifted to the point where they could deliver Metro money via some new route.

How would Natcher finally be sidestepped? The Nixon administration tried, through a new Highway Act that it helped shepherd through Congress in 1973. The act gave urban areas the right to shift highway funds to subways if they chose. Its floor leader in the Senate was Edward M. Kennedy (D-Mass.). But Congress,

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displaying its traditional attitude toward its home city, specifically exempted the District of Columbia from the provisions of the act.

Finally, in 1976, that new political route did appear. Secretary of Transportation William T. Coleman, on behalf of the Ford administration, announced that his department would guarantee whatever money Metro needed to build its entire 103-mile system, as long as Congress freed up Washington's long-frozen share. Then and only then, under intense pressure from Democratic leaders on Capitol Hill, did William Natcher fold his cards.

Like Walter Fauntroy, Peter Craig found Natcher a very curious person.

"I went to talk to him" in the early 1970s, Craig recalls. "I talked to him for two hours. He agreed that all these freeways were terrible, that they'd wreck Washington." But in public, Natcher stuck stonily to his demand that the freeways be built.

"We needed to even the playing field, to change the premises under which the planners were operating," says Craig. "I was not satisfied that the war was won until Teddy Kennedy got the Highway Trust Fund opened up. That plus home rule tipped the scales here."

For Walter Fauntroy, the attempt to plaster Washington with freeways was part of a larger effort to drive low- and moderate-income blacks out of the city.

Fauntroy thinks that effort began in 1945. Thousands of low- and moderate-income blacks lived in row houses in Georgetown then. But "some people decided they were nice places. So they put a little powder and paint on them and sold them to the Senator Kennedys of this world," Fauntroy says.

Then, in the late 1950s, "some people said, 'That's too slow. Let's have urban renewal.' " The result: Predominantly black Southwest Washington was leveled and redeveloped with millions in federal money. Thousands of low- and moderate-income residents were turned out. Fauntroy called the plan "Negro removal." He still calls it that now.

"So when the highway push started, it was all about the same thing. It was more urban removal. I decided to stay and fight," says Fauntroy, speaking on a rainy night in the meeting room of his church.

"I could have left. In fact, when I first took over as pastor here, I made a 20-year plan. I took a look around." Then he grins and adds: "I concluded that the best thing to do would be to move to Prince George's County and wait for the people to come there, too."

Because he was vice chairman of the D.C. Council, Fauntroy had a seat on the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority, the governing board of Metro. He became chairman in 1969. "It was obvious we needed a subway system that could move people around," he says. "My role here was to mobilize people" to support it.

Fauntroy says that highway backers did not appreciate the key truth about freeways: As soon as you build them, they're full.

He acknowledges that sometimes, as he drives from his church to his private

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office on Capitol Hill, he catches himself wishing that there were a freeway "so I could be going 50 miles an hour.

"But I know I'd be going four miles an hour. And so would everybody else."

Reginald Booker says that when Sammie Abbott first told him about the anti-freeway fight, "I couldn't imagine why District officials would allow this. I had a responsibility even as one person [to oppose it]. What motivated me was that it was a moral question of right and wrong."

And also of black home ownership.

"My mother and stepfather struggled to buy their home," Booker says. "My mother scrubbed floors at night on Capitol Hill to pay for it. For the African American family, that is the major investment. Our family had already been uprooted [in Southwest] by something we had no control over. I wasn't going to let it happen to others."

At the time, Booker was working as a clerk for the General Services Administration. He was often on television and often quoted in the newspapers. "A lot of my co-workers were scared of me," he recalls.

So were his bosses. One day, after he referred to the D.C. Council on television as "President Johnson's ranch hands," Booker was called into the office of the GSA administrator. He was told that his picture would henceforth be posted in the GSA security office so guards would know who he was. He was criticized for "embarrassing the president." The administrator, Lawson B. Knott Jr., suggested that Booker might be "happier elsewhere."

So Booker resigned. Since then, he has worked for a law firm and as a foster care administrator for a social services agency. He ran twice for the D.C. school board and lost both times. He says that a caution he received in the 1960s has proved to be accurate.

"Julius Hobson [a well-known activist of the day] said to me, 'Reginald, you will never win the Man of the Year Award for what you're doing.' "

"I'm personally satisfied," he says. "I saw this as my social responsibility. It was just a natural thing to do for me."

On the day that the U Street-Cardozo subway station opened in 1991, D.C. Council member Hilda Mason invited Booker to attend a ceremony. She asked him to stand. She told the small crowd that Booker had been a leader in the effort to bring the subway to Washington. There was brief applause, but nothing more.

It is the only public recognition Reginald Booker has ever received.

Peter Stebbins Craig spent 37 years as a lawyer. He retired in 1989 after long stints as general counsel to the Southern Railway and Amtrak. "I got tired of moving money from one deep pocket to another," he says.

Craig, who is now 72, has received many honors for his anti-freeway work. Washingtonian magazine named him a "Washingtonian of the Year" in 1972. The Committee of 100 threw a bash in his honor. He donated his papers to Gelman Library at George Washington University, which was grateful to have them.

END OF THE ROADS; In the Interstate Era, Congress ruled Washington like a fiefdom. Then a fight over some freeways inspired a biracial, neighborhood-level movement to fight the federal power The Washington Post November 26, 2000, Sunday, Final Edition Correction Appended

"I wasn't a tie-myself-to-a-tree kind of person," he says, as he relights his pipe. "Still, I feel that, while I've done a lot of things in my life, this has made the most difference."

Walter Fauntroy, now 67, looks at rewards in a different way.

"The vindication of the effort was that today, we have a rational subway system that is complete," he says. "When I get on that subway, with all those people, I wonder, 'What would it have been like if we had not had that subway?' That's my reward. We have made it a little better for both races."

Janet Johnson lives in a two-story row house near 10th and Lawrence streets NE. The house is within walking distance of the Brookland Metro station. It cost her \$ 88,000. She has lived there for seven years. She is a secretary for the District government.

Johnson, who is 33, tells a visitor that she is very happy with the neighborhood, although she could do without the whooshing noise of Red Line trains that pass constantly, a block and a half away.

The visitor asks if she knows that a 10-lane freeway called the North Central was once close to being built right where she's sitting. Does she know that her house was boarded up in the early 1970s, in anticipation of being torn down? Does she know that protesters, led by Reginald Booker, were arrested when they ripped the boards off?

"A freeway here?" says Johnson. "Not here! Not possible."

Drive, they said

What was planned but never paved in Washington

The road-building plan Harland Bartholomew proposed for Washington in 1956 was nothing if not comprehensive. It called for not one, but three highways running circles around (or through) the District. Of those three, only one -- the Capital Beltway -- was ever built. Here are other projects from Bartholomew's plan that never made it off the drawing boards:

The Three Sisters Bridge would have carried a branch of Interstate 66 over the Potomac, from Spout Run in Arlington to Canal Road in Georgetown. The eight-lane bridge would have crossed the water where three large rocks (the "three sisters") sit huddled together in mid-river. One architect's sketch capped the bridge with a huge swooping arch that would have stretched 750 feet into the sky, similar to the Gateway Arch in St. Louis.

The Potomac Freeway would have channeled traffic from the Three Sisters Bridge along the Georgetown waterfront and onto a newly tunneled K Street. It would have been eight lanes wide, double the size of the existing Whitehurst Freeway.

The Palisades Parkway, four lanes wide, would have gone northwest from the Three Sisters Bridge to the Capital Beltway in Cabin John, along the Maryland side of the Potomac riverfront.

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The K Street Freeway would have tunneled eight lanes of superhighway beneath this major downtown artery from Foggy Bottom to Seventh Street NW. The spaghetti of approach lanes and exit ramps that now sits near the Kennedy Center would have been the western terminus of this freeway.

The North Central Freeway would have linked Silver Spring and Capitol Hill, taking roughly the same route that Metro's Red Line follows today between Union Station and Silver Spring and then connecting with the Beltway just west of Georgia Avenue. The 10-lane North Central would have destroyed 4,000 homes, almost all of them belonging to low- and moderate-income black Washingtonians.

The Northeast Freeway would have allowed I-95 to continue through Prince George's County and into the District, where it would have joined the North Central near what is now the Fort Totten Metro station. The 10 lanes of the Northeast would have gone through well-settled portions of Langley Park and Takoma Park.

The North Leg of the East Section, or the Industrial Freeway, would have run in six lanes from I-395 just north of the Capitol to Kenilworth Avenue in Maryland, along the New York Avenue corridor.

The South Leg of the Inner Loop would have tunneled under the Mall, beginning beneath the Lincoln Memorial, running below the Tidal Basin and emerging between the 14th Street Bridge and the Jefferson Memorial (in one early rendering, it would have been trenched through the Mall, not tunneled). The "Inner Loop" would have been the innermost of Bartholomew's three circumferential highways -- a mini-Beltway that would have circled the District about half a mile north and south of the White House. -- B.L. and J.F.L.

LOAD-DATE: November 26, 2000

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

CORRECTION-DATE: November 25, 2000

CORRECTION: A Nov. 26 article incorrectly identified the constitutional provision at issue in the pending Supreme Court case on the presidential election in Florida. It is Article II, Section 1.